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YUMEKUI KENBUN

NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR

STORY AND ART BY SHIN MASHIB

4

2005

YUMEKUI KENBUN

NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR

4

For those who suffer nightmares, help awaits at the Silver Star Tea House, where patrons can order much more than just Darjeeling. Hiruko is a special kind of private investigator. He's a dream eater. And he'll rid you of your darkest visions...*for a price.*

SHADOWS

Dreams on the menu in this volume: a man and woman trapped on a malevolent streetcar, a mysterious woman with a possible key to Hiruko's past, letters in a bottle that aren't the usual call for help, a young girl who dreams of a miserable future, a boy being chased by shadows, and a nightmare in which Hiruko himself disappears!

ARE YOU AFRAID *YOUR* DREAMS MIGHT COME TRUE?

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This book reads from right to left.

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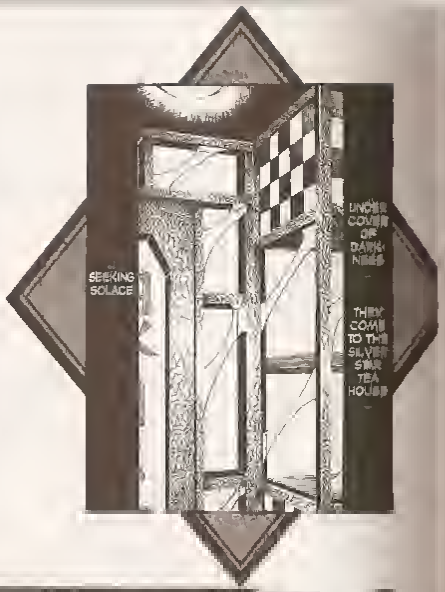
SHADOWS

The Twentieth Night: Parasite



YES, I TOLD HIM ABOUT HIRUKO AND HE SAID HE HAD A NIGHTMARE FOR HIM TO EAT.
SO TONIGHT'S CUSTOMER IS YOUR CHILDHOOD FRIEND, HIFUMI?

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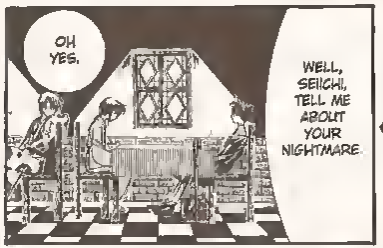
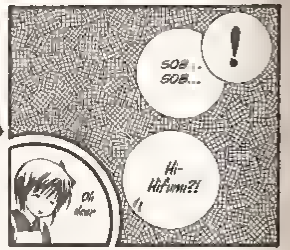
NO, I'VE NEVER FELT LONELY.
BESIDES, HIFUMI WOULD JUST BARGE INTO MY ROOM AND START TALKING TO HIMSELF...

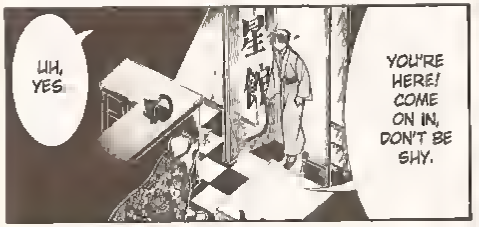

OH YES.
WELL, SEIICHI, TELL ME ABOUT YOUR NIGHTMARE.


!
SOB... SOB...
Hi-Hifumi?!
Oh dear

SHE'S A TRAM CONDUCTOR ...

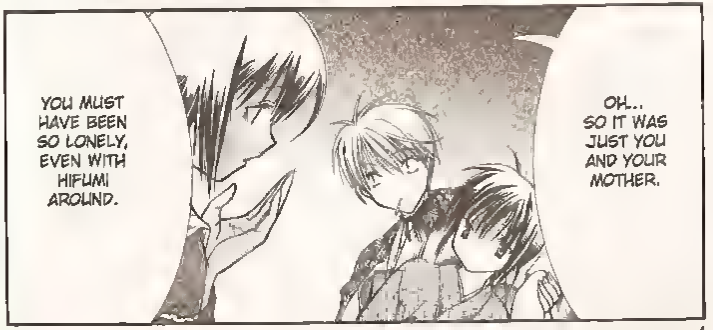
BUT IN MY DREAMS, I'M IN LOVE WITH A WOMAN NAMED KEIKO.
YOU MIGHT THINK THIS IS WEIRD...

FIDGET
UM... WELL...
KEIKO...
FIDGET

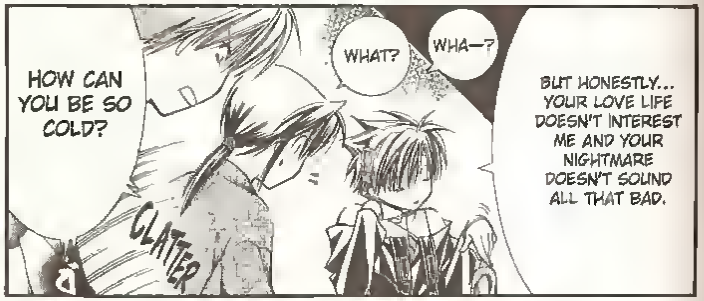

UH, YES.
YOU'RE HERE! COME ON IN, DON'T BE SHY.

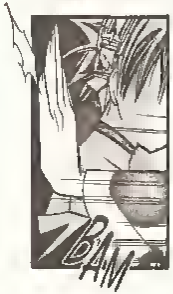
G-GOOD EVENING.

THIS IS MY FRIEND SEIICHI NAGUMO.
HIS FATHER DIED WHEN HE WAS YOUNG, SO I'VE BEEN LIKE A FATHER FIGURE TO HIM EVER SINCE.


OH... SO IT WAS JUST YOU AND YOUR MOTHER.
YOU MUST HAVE BEEN SO LONELY, EVEN WITH HIFUMI AROUND.

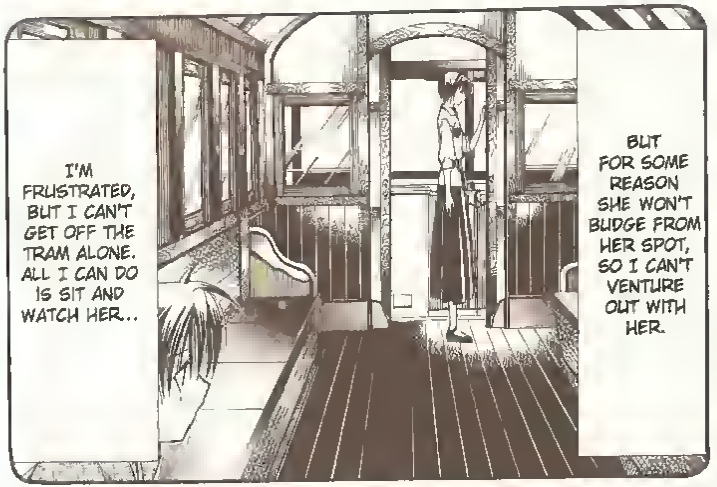
HMM... HE'S PRETTY WORKED UP ABOUT THIS.
I REALLY CARE FOR HER!
DON'T MAKE FUN OF ME! I'M SERIOUS!


HOW CAN YOU BE SO COLD?
WHAT?
WHA—?
BUT HONESTLY... YOUR LOVE LIFE DOESN'T INTEREST ME AND YOUR NIGHTMARE DOESN'T SOUND ALL THAT BAD.
CLATTER

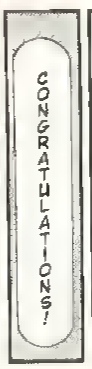

BAM...

What is it?

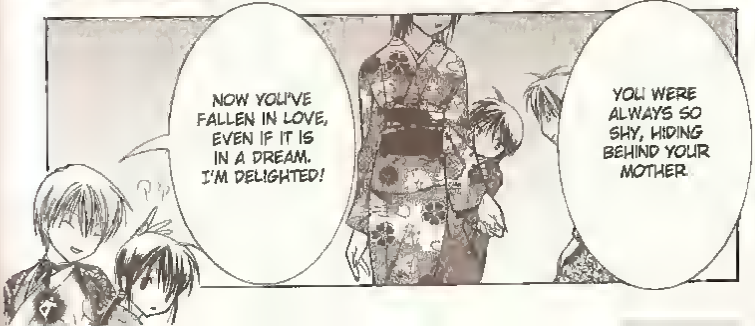
COME HERE, HIRUKO!
YANK


I'M FRUSTRATED, BUT I CAN'T GET OFF THE TRAM ALONE. ALL I CAN DO IS SIT AND WATCH HER...
BUT FOR SOME REASON SHE WON'T BUDGE FROM HER SPOT, SO I CAN'T VENTURE OUT WITH HER.

YOU'VE FINALLY BECOME A MAN.
HUH?!
PAT PAT


CONGRATULATIONS!

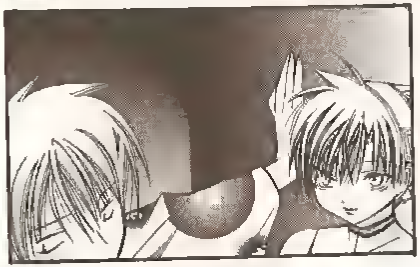
SO I WANT YOU TO HELP ME GET HER OFF THE TRAM...
CAN'T GET OFF, HUH...


NOW YOU'VE FALLEN IN LOVE, EVEN IF IT IS IN A DREAM. I'M DELIGHTED!
YOU WERE ALWAYS SO SHY, HIDING BEHIND YOUR MOTHER.

SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

IT'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR HIM.
THIS IS PROBABLY HIS FIRST LOVE.

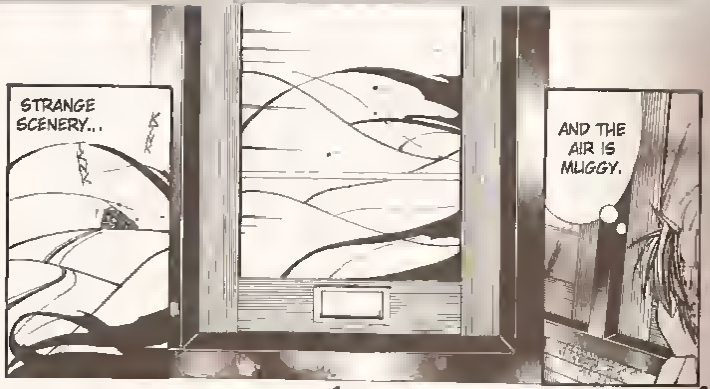
LIKE I JUST SAID... SEIICHI IS SHY AND DOESN'T GET OUT MUCH, SO HE DOESN'T HAVE MUCH EXPERIENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS.

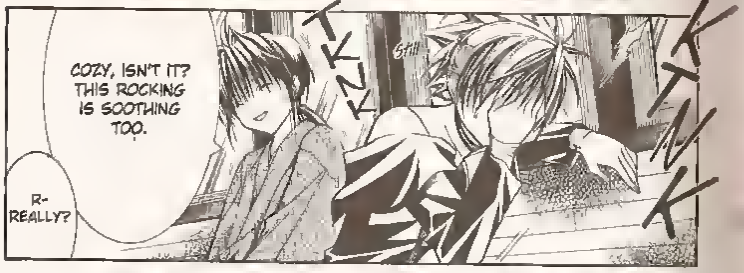


EVEN IF IT IS JUST A DREAM, PLEASE DO SOME-THING ...

A GOOD OPPORTUNITY?
TRYING TO BE HIS FATHER, EH?

FINE I GUESS I'LL HELP YOU SAVE FACE TONIGHT.
Why you!


STRANGE SCENERY...
AND THE AIR IS MUGGY.


COZY, ISN'T IT? THIS ROCKING IS SOOTHING TOO.
R-REALLY?
Still...
KTNK
KTNK

THAT'S WHEN I STARTED HAVING THIS DREAM..

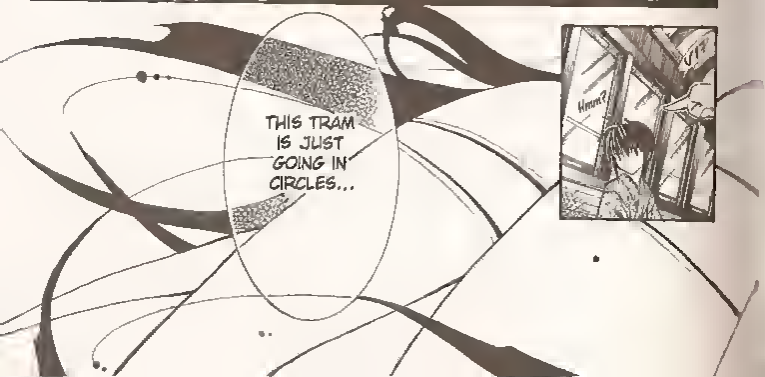
ANY-WAY...

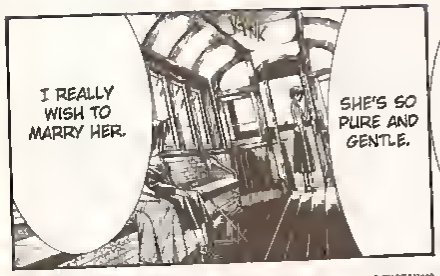
LATELY, THERE'S BEEN A MAN COMING AROUND TO VISIT MY MOTHER IT'S GOTTEN SO BAD THAT I'VE BEEN SHUTTING MYSELF IN MY ROOM.
He's a good person though
TO BE HONEST, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I DON'T EVEN LIKE HAVING HIFUMI AROUND.

I HEARD YOU DON'T LIKE GOING OUTSIDE MUCH...
HMM... WELL...
I'M UNCOMFORTABLE AROUND STRANGERS..

IT'S PRETTY SHAKY.
KTNK
KTNK

THEN FIRST WE HAVE TO STOP THE TRAM.
Oh right!
BY THE WAY... SEIICHI, HAVE YOU NOTICED?


THIS TRAM IS JUST GOING IN CIRCLES...
Hmm?


I REALLY WISH TO MARRY HER.
SHE'S SO PURE AND GENTLE.

SMILE
IT'S NOT JUST A CRUSH. I FEEL LIKE I'VE KNOWN HER FOREVER.

THAT'S KEIKO OVER THERE.

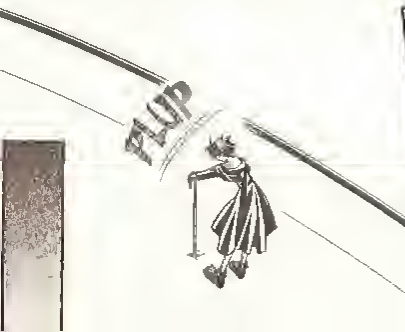
NO. I REALLY WANT US TO GO OUT INTO THE WORLD TOGETHER... BUT...

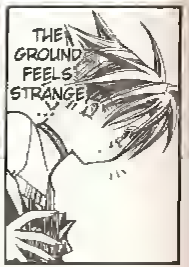
SHE'S NEVER TRIED TO APPROACH YOU, HAS SHE?

OUR HEARTS ARE STRONGLY INTER-TWINED.
I SEE.
...
BUT ...

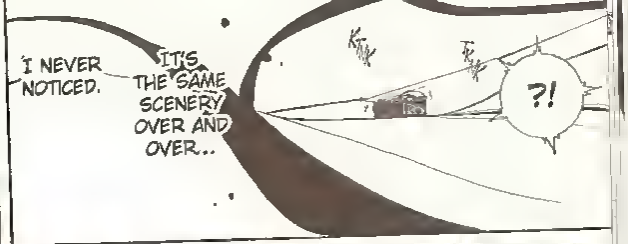
VWEEE

FWOMP

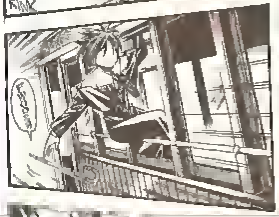

PLOP


THE GROUND FEELS STRANGE...

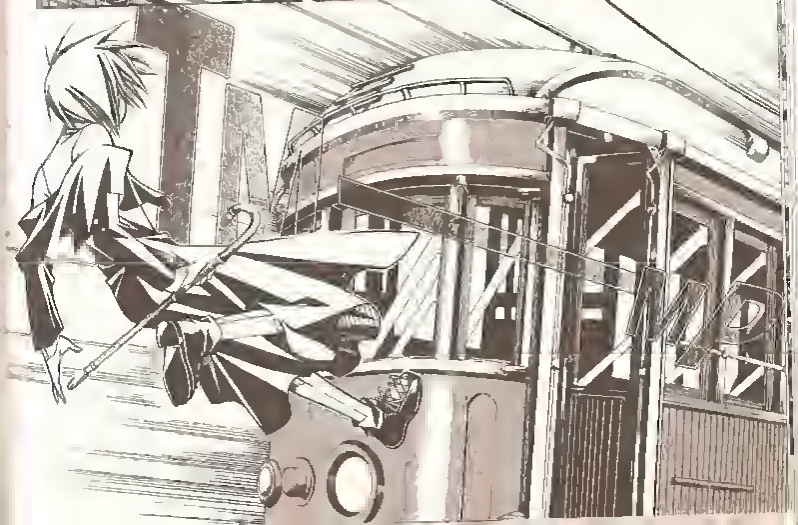
OH! THEN, HIRUKO...

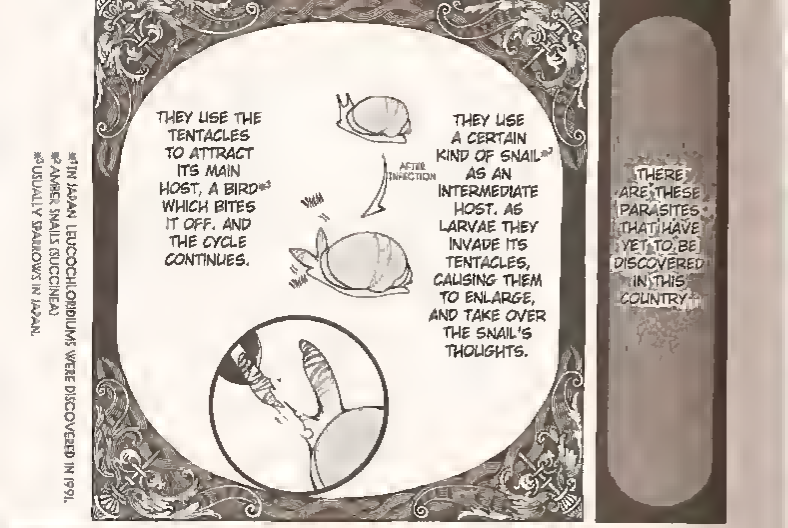

I NEVER NOTICED.
IT'S THE SAME SCENERY OVER AND OVER..
?!

I SUPPOSE ...

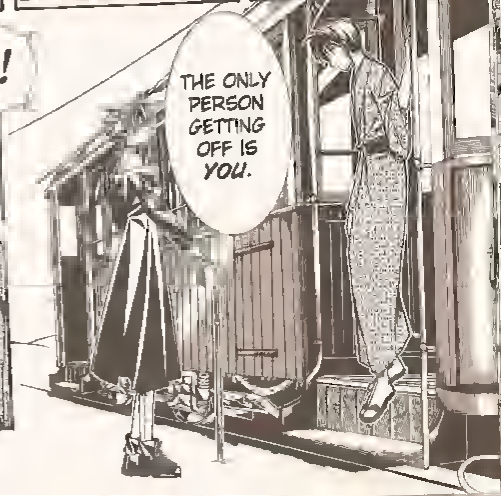


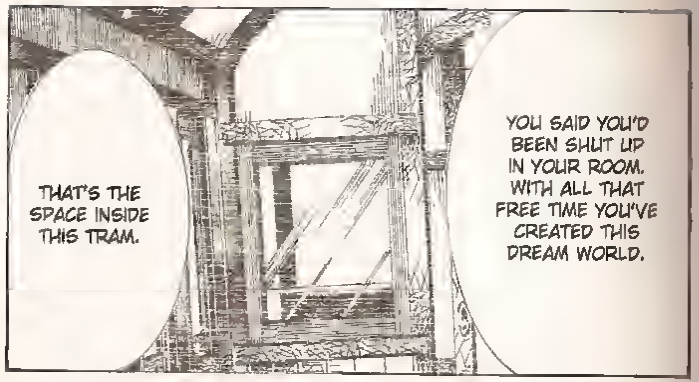
THEN THE TRAM WILL HAVE TO STOP!
CAN YOU JUMP OUT THE WINDOW AND CREATE A TRAM STOP?

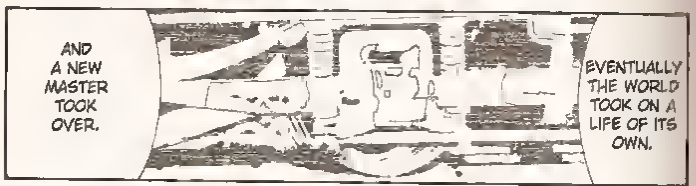


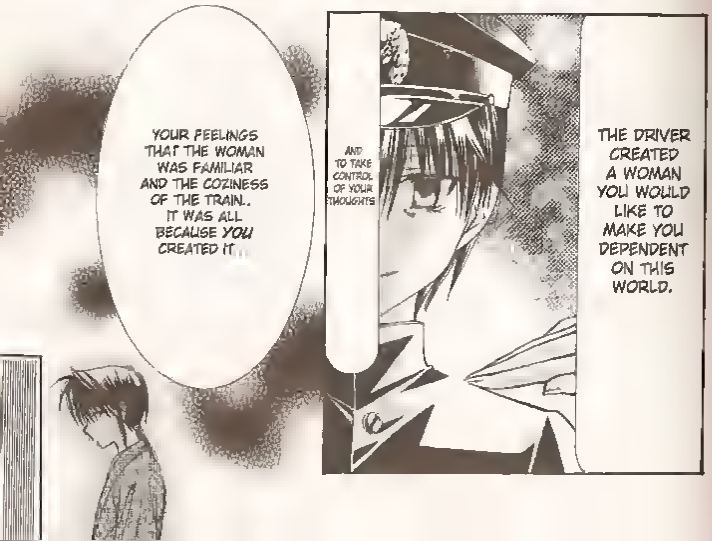

THEY USE THE TENTACLES TO ATTRACT ITS MAIN HOST, A BIRD[#3] WHICH BITES IT OFF. AND THE CYCLE CONTINUES.
AFTER INFECTION
THEY USE A CERTAIN KIND OF SNAIL[#2] AS AN INTERMEDIATE HOST. AS LARVAE THEY INVADE ITS TENTACLES, CAUSING THEM TO ENLARGE, AND TAKE OVER THE SNAIL'S THOUGHTS.
THERE ARE THESE PARASITES THAT HAVE YET TO BE DISCOVERED IN THIS COUNTRY.

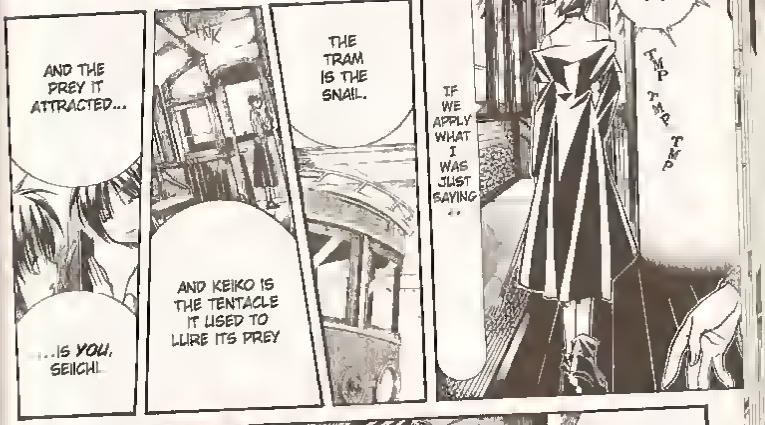
#1 IN JAPAN, LEUCOCHLORIDIUM WERE DISCOVERED IN 1974.
#2 AMBER SNAILS (SUCCINEA)
#3 USUALLY SPARROWS IN JAPAN.



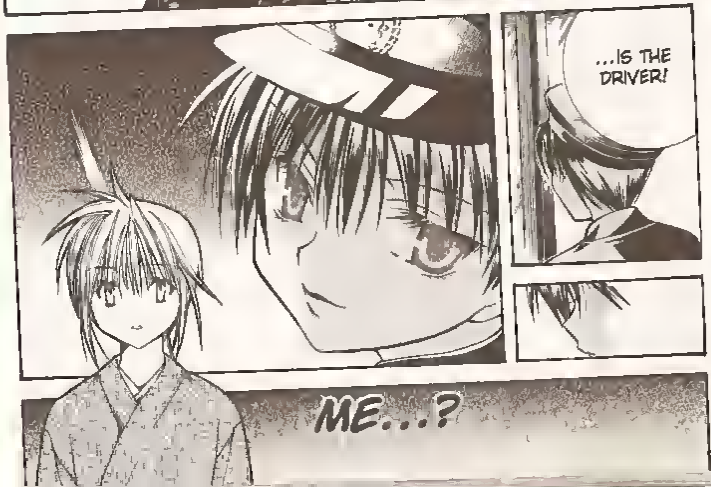

THAT'S THE SPACE INSIDE THIS TRAM.
YOU SAID YOU'D BEEN SHUT UP IN YOUR ROOM. WITH ALL THAT FREE TIME YOU'VE CREATED THIS DREAM WORLD.

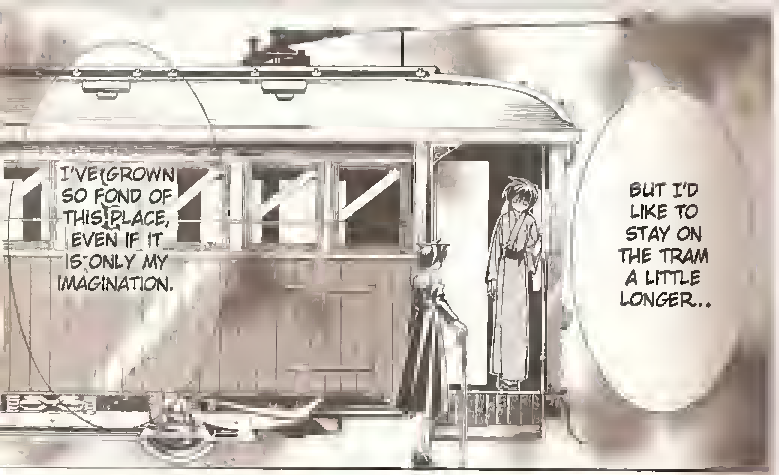

AND A NEW MASTER TOOK OVER.
EVENTUALLY THE WORLD TOOK ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN.

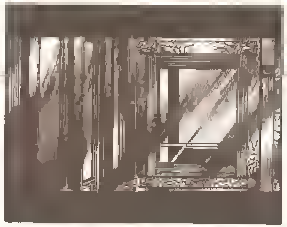

YOUR FEELINGS THAT THE WOMAN WAS FAMILIAR AND THE COZINESS OF THE TRAIN. IT WAS ALL BECAUSE YOU CREATED IT...
AND TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR THOUGHTS
THE DRIVER CREATED A WOMAN YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE YOU DEPENDENT ON THIS WORLD.


AND THE PREY IT ATTRACTED...
...IS YOU, SEIICHI.
THE TRAM IS THE SNAIL.
AND KEIKO IS THE TENTACLE IT USED TO LURE ITS PREY
IF WE APPLY WHAT I WAS JUST SAYING...
?!
TMP TMP TMP

YES, AND THE PARASITE BEHIND IT ALL...
KEIKO IS JUST BAIT TO LURE ME IN?!


...IS THE DRIVER!
ME...?


I'VE GROWN SO FOND OF THIS PLACE, EVEN IF IT IS ONLY MY IMAGINATION.
BUT I'D LIKE TO STAY ON THE TRAM A LITTLE LONGER...

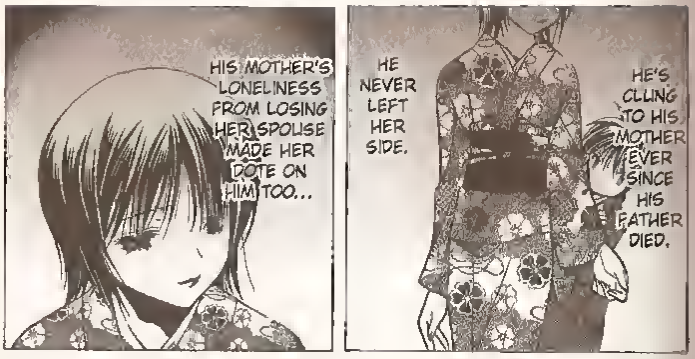


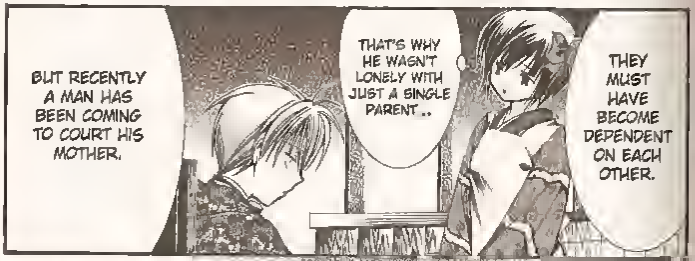
TIME TO WAKE UP NOW.
BUT LET'S LEAVE THIS NIGHT-MARE FOR NOW.
ALL RIGHT.

FOOSH

THAT'S WHAT BEING WITH KEIKO TRULY MEANT.
I ALMOST GOT CAUGHT UP IN SOMETHING I CREATED MYSELF...

I'LL HAVE TO START DEALING WITH PEOPLE FROM THE REAL WORLD.
CAN YOU DO IT?
YES. AND GETTING OFF THE TRAM MEANS YOU'LL BE LEAVING THAT WORLD BEHIND.
GRIP
YES... I HAVE NO CHOICE.

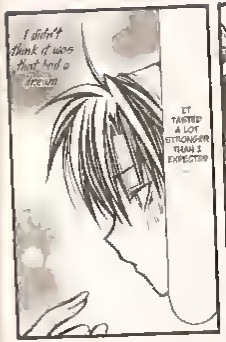

HIS MOTHER'S LONELINESS FROM LOSING HER SPOUSE MADE HER DOTE ON HIM TOO...
HE NEVER LEFT HER SIDE.
HE'S CLING TO HIS MOTHER EVER SINCE HIS FATHER DIED.


BUT RECENTLY A MAN HAS BEEN COMING TO COURT HIS MOTHER.
THAT'S WHY HE WASN'T LONELY WITH JUST A SINGLE PARENT..
THEY MUST HAVE BECOME DEPENDENT ON EACH OTHER.

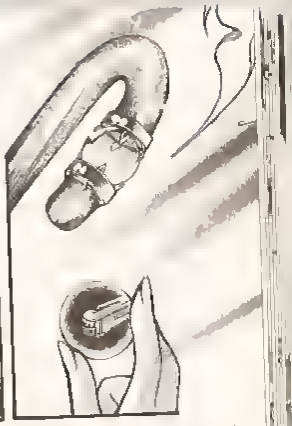
THEY'VE BOTH BEEN STRUGGLING
HIS MOTHER IS HAVING A HARD TIME CHOOSING BETWEEN HER BELOVED SON AND HER NEW COMPANION.

...HE ALSO COULDN'T ACCEPT ANOTHER PERSON INTRUDING ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP.
WHILE SEIICHI WANTS HIS MOTHER TO BE HAPPY...

SO HE SHUT HIMSELF IN HIS ROOM


I didn't think it was that bad a dream
IT TASTED A LOT STRONGER THAN I EXPECTED

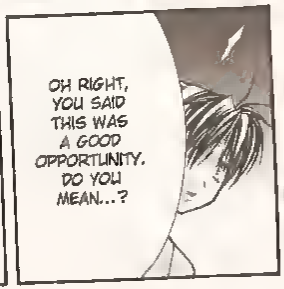
BLECH!
GULP
WHAT IS IT?



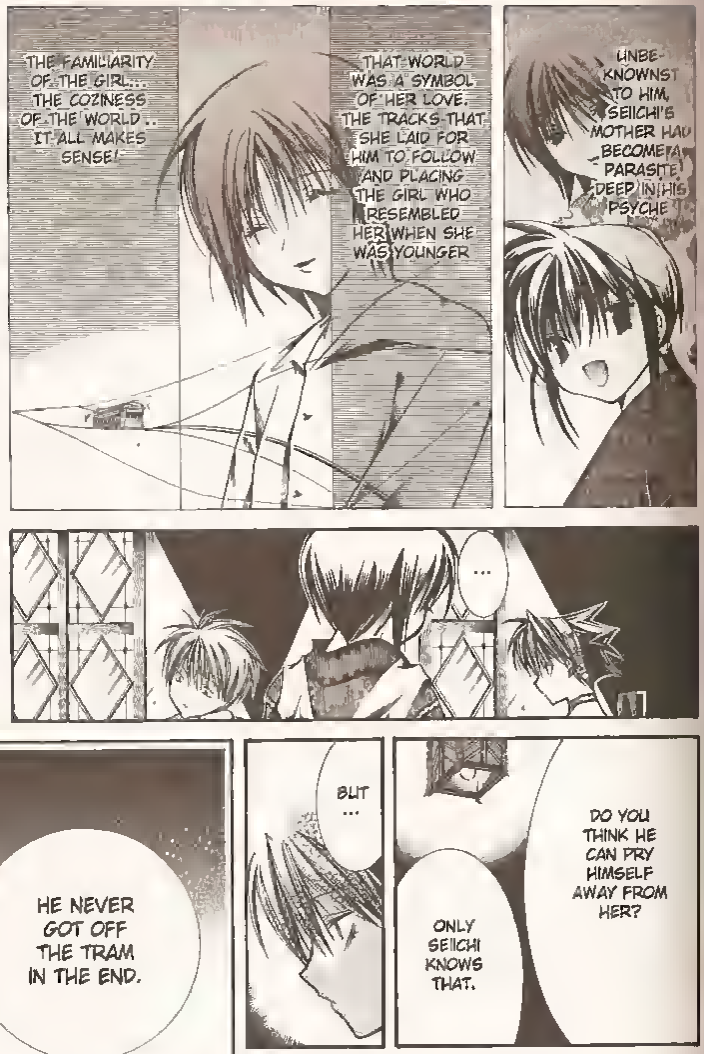
WHOM?
IF HE COULD LEAVE HER..

I HOPE SEIICHI CAN BE MORE INDEPENDENT NOW.
HMM...

LEAVE HIS MOTHER...?
CLATTER
YES. I THOUGHT HE WOULD LEAVE HIS MOTHER IF HE FELL IN LOVE.


OH RIGHT, YOU SAID THIS WAS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY. DO YOU MEAN...?

HIS MOTHER.

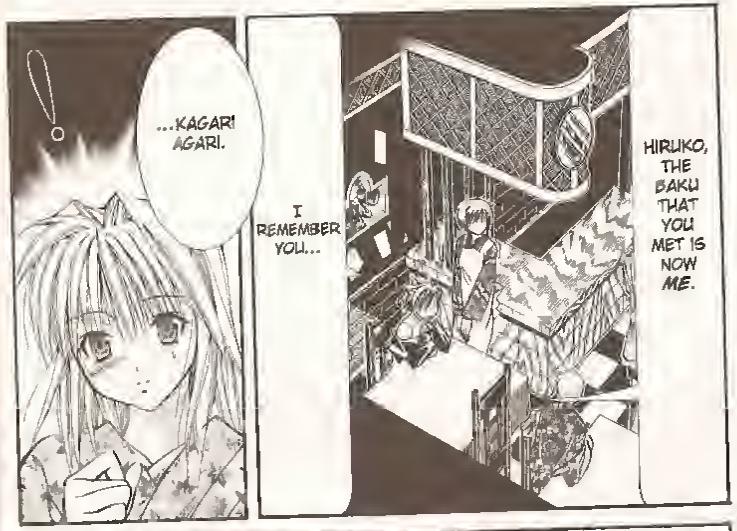

THE FAMILIARITY OF THE GIRL... THE COZINESS OF THE WORLD.. IT ALL MAKES SENSE!
THAT WORLD WAS A SYMBOL OF HER LOVE. THE TRACKS THAT SHE LAID FOR HIM TO FOLLOW AND PLACING THE GIRL WHO RESEMBLED HER WHEN SHE WAS YOUNGER
UNBE-KNOWNST TO HIM, SEIICHI'S MOTHER HAD BECOME A PARASITE DEEP IN HIS PSYCHE
...
HE NEVER GOT OFF THE TRAM IN THE END.
BUT ...
ONLY SEIICHI KNOWS THAT.
DO YOU THINK HE CAN PRY HIMSELF AWAY FROM HER?

BUT MAYBE THE TENTACLE WAS ACTUALLY THE WHOLE TRAIN.
I THOUGHT THE TENTACLE WAS KEIKO.
?!
COULD IT BE...?!
TWUMP
OH, NOTHING ...
WHAT IS IT?
YES, THE MOTHER WHO RELIED ON HER SON.
SO THEN THE GROUND IS...
THE TRAIN WAS GROWING OUT OF THE GROUND... AND IT ALREADY HAD CONTROL OF THE BIRD, SEIICHI.
THAT MEANS THE REAL HOST WAS THAT STRANGE GROUND.

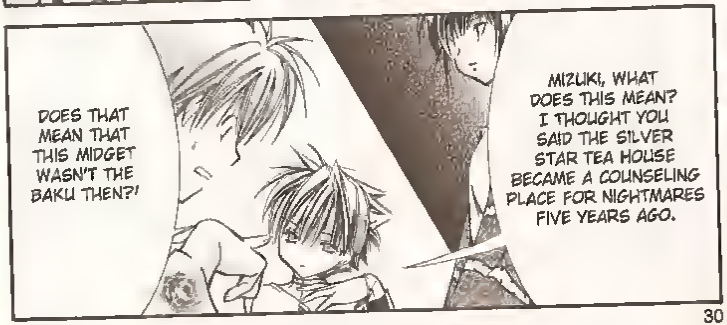
The Twenty-First Night: The Key (Part One)

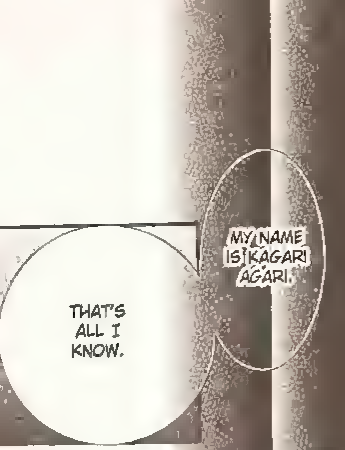
THAT CAN'T BE!
?
SEEKING SOLACE
UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS...
THEY COME TO THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE.
WHEN I CAME HERE TWO YEARS AGO, THE BAKU WAS OLDER AND TALLER!
SMIRK
YOU'RE HIRUKO?
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!

THIS HIRUKO CAME TWO YEARS AGO.
HE INHERITED THE SAME THOUGHTS AND ABILITIES, PLUS SOME OF THE MEMORIES.
EVEN THOUGH THE PREVIOUS BAKU LOOKED AND ACTED DIFFERENT, THEY ARE STILL THE SAME BAKU CALLED "HIRUKO."
SO WHAT KIND OF PERSON WAS THE LAST BAKU?
THE BAKU CHANGES...
THAT'S WHY HE KNOWS ME...
AZUSA... HE WAS MY BROTHER.


!
...KAGARI AGARI.
I REMEMBER YOU...
HIRUKO, THE BAKU THAT YOU MET IS NOW ME.

BUT...
TH-THAT'S RIGHT.
YOUR NAME IS EASY TO REMEMBER... BUT WASN'T THAT THE NAME OF THE PERSON YOU LOVED?

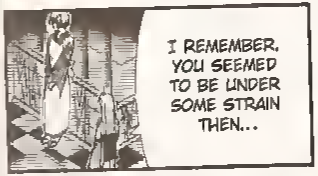

DOES THAT MEAN THAT THIS MIDGET WASN'T THE BAKU THEN?!
MIZUKI, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? I THOUGHT YOU SAID THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE BECAME A COUNSELING PLACE FOR NIGHTMARES FIVE YEARS AGO.


MY NAME IS KAGARI AGARI.
THAT'S ALL I KNOW.

I HAVE NO MEMORIES OF MY PAST.

I DON'T KNOW IF THIS MEANS ANYTHING BUT I'VE BEEN HAVING THIS NIGHTMARE.

HE'S NOT HERE ANYMORE? BUT WHY...?

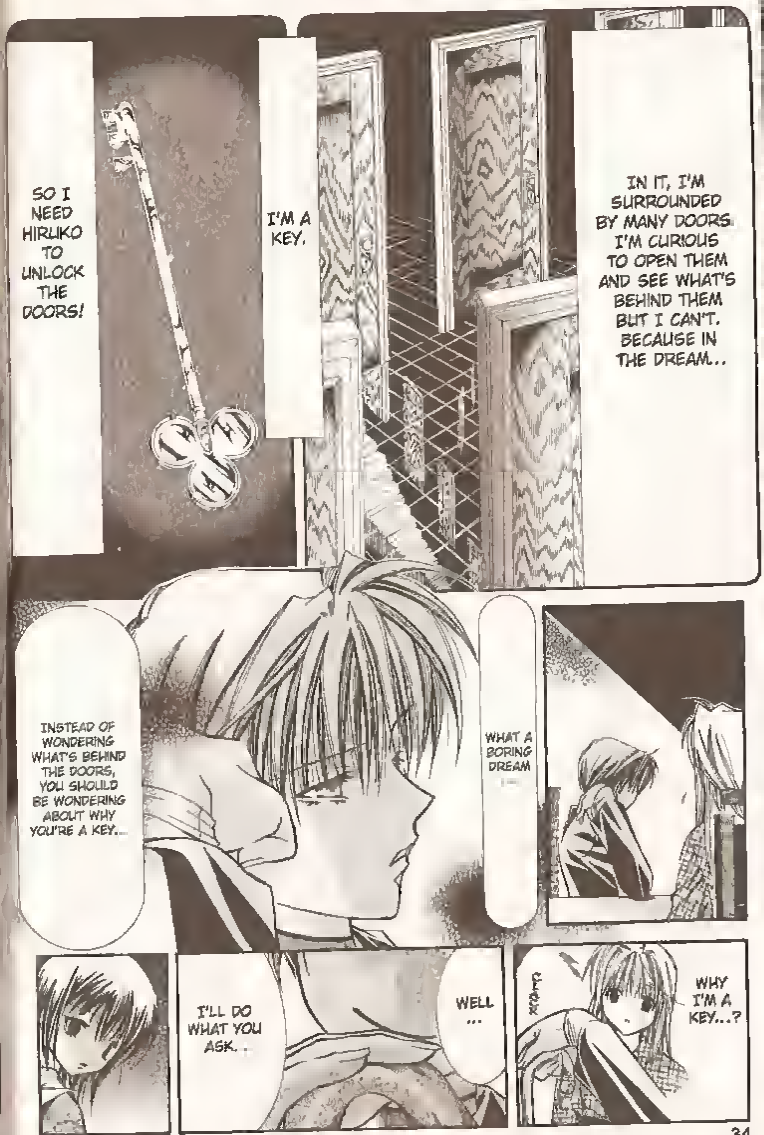

I REMEMBER. YOU SEEMED TO BE UNDER SOME STRAIN THEN...

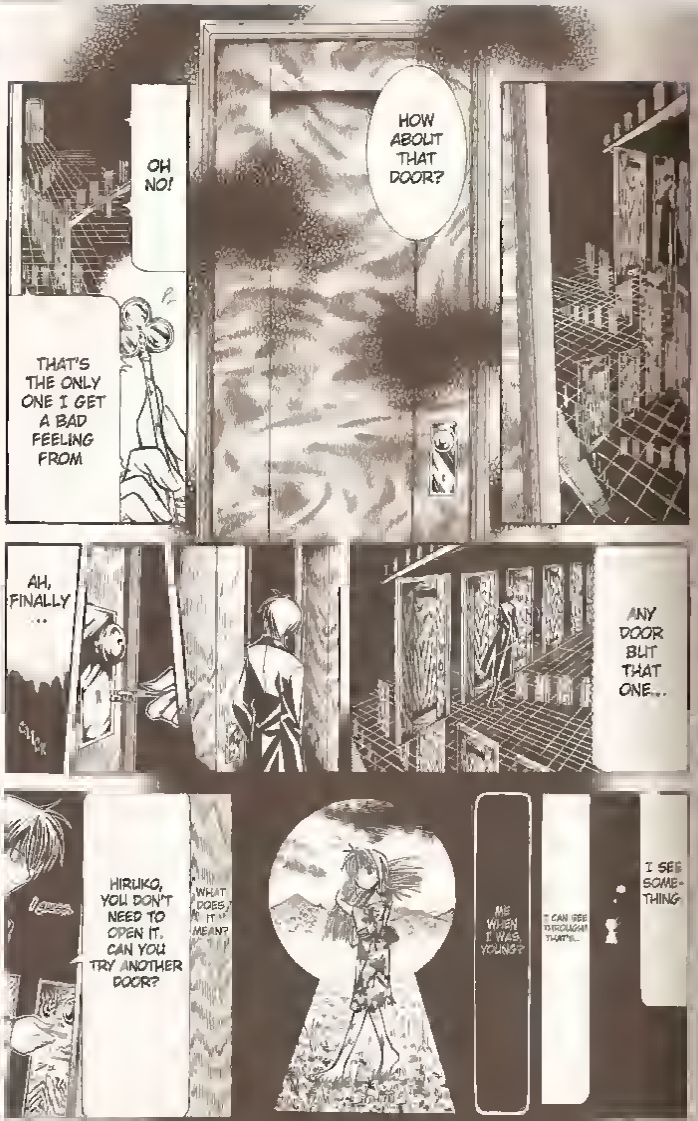
?!
YOUR BROTHER?!
YOU SAID HE DISAPPEARED TWO YEARS AGO...

AND AZUSA GOT RID OF IT FOR YOU...
YOU HAD PREVIOUSLY COME WITH PROBLEMS OF A NIGHTMARE.
KAGARI, WHY HAVE YOU COME HERE NOW?

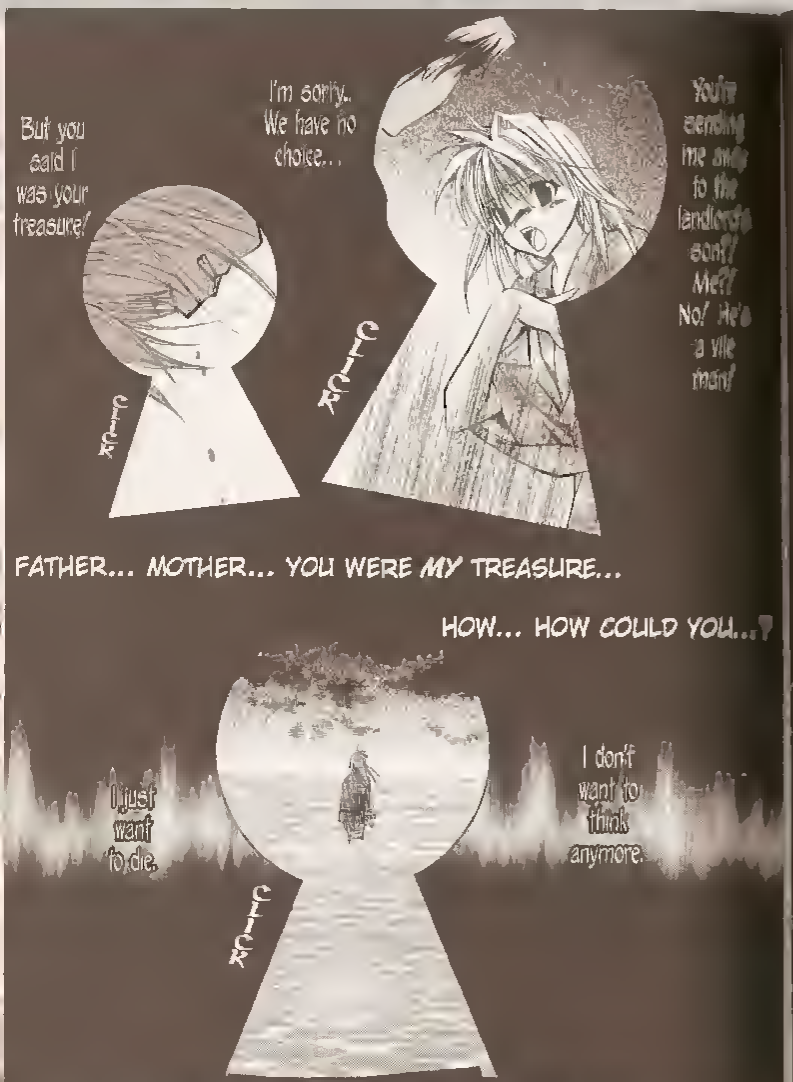
DO YOU REMEMBER?
MY NIGHTMARE...
...
?
BUT NOW THE OUTCOME IS CAUSING ME PAIN.
YES...

FOOSH
I'VE JUST THOUGHT OF AN INTERESTING WAY TO DO IT
SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

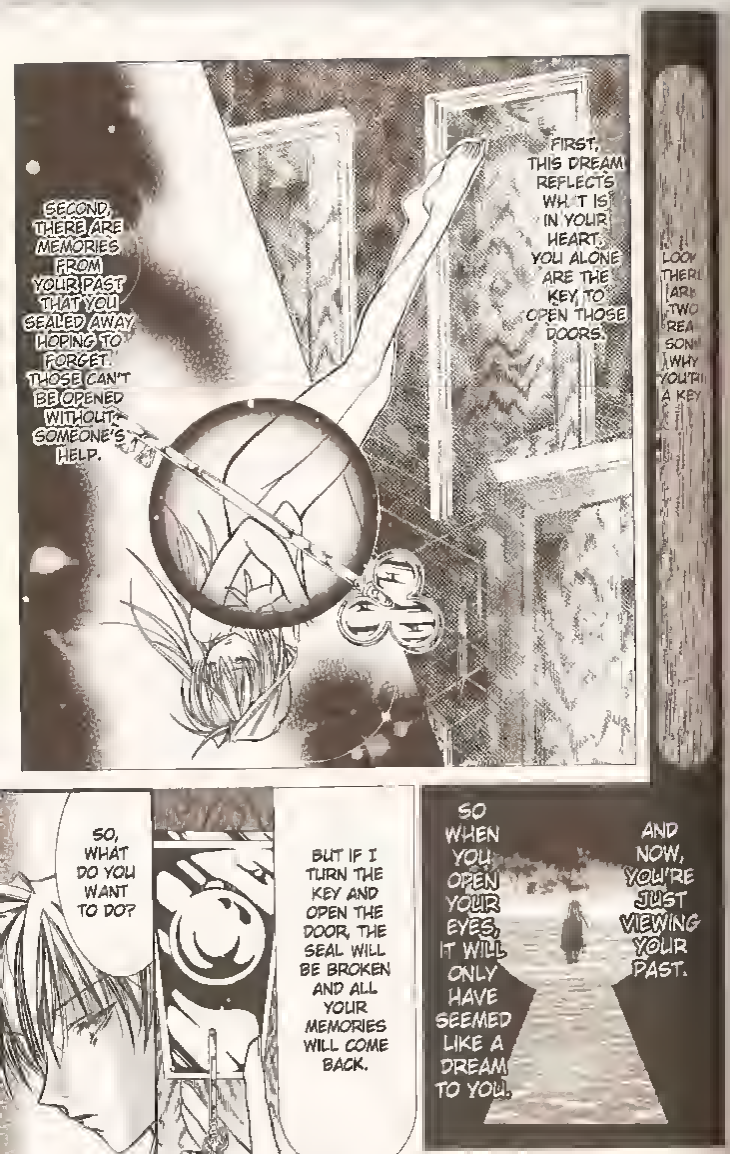

SO I NEED HIRUKO TO UNLOCK THE DOORS!
I'M A KEY.
IN IT, I'M SURROUNDED BY MANY DOORS. I'M CURIOUS TO OPEN THEM AND SEE WHAT'S BEHIND THEM BUT I CAN'T. BECAUSE IN THE DREAM...
INSTEAD OF WONDERING WHAT'S BEHIND THE DOORS, YOU SHOULD BE WONDERING ABOUT WHY YOU'RE A KEY...
WHAT A BORING DREAM
I'LL DO WHAT YOU ASK..
WELL ...
WHY I'M A KEY...?

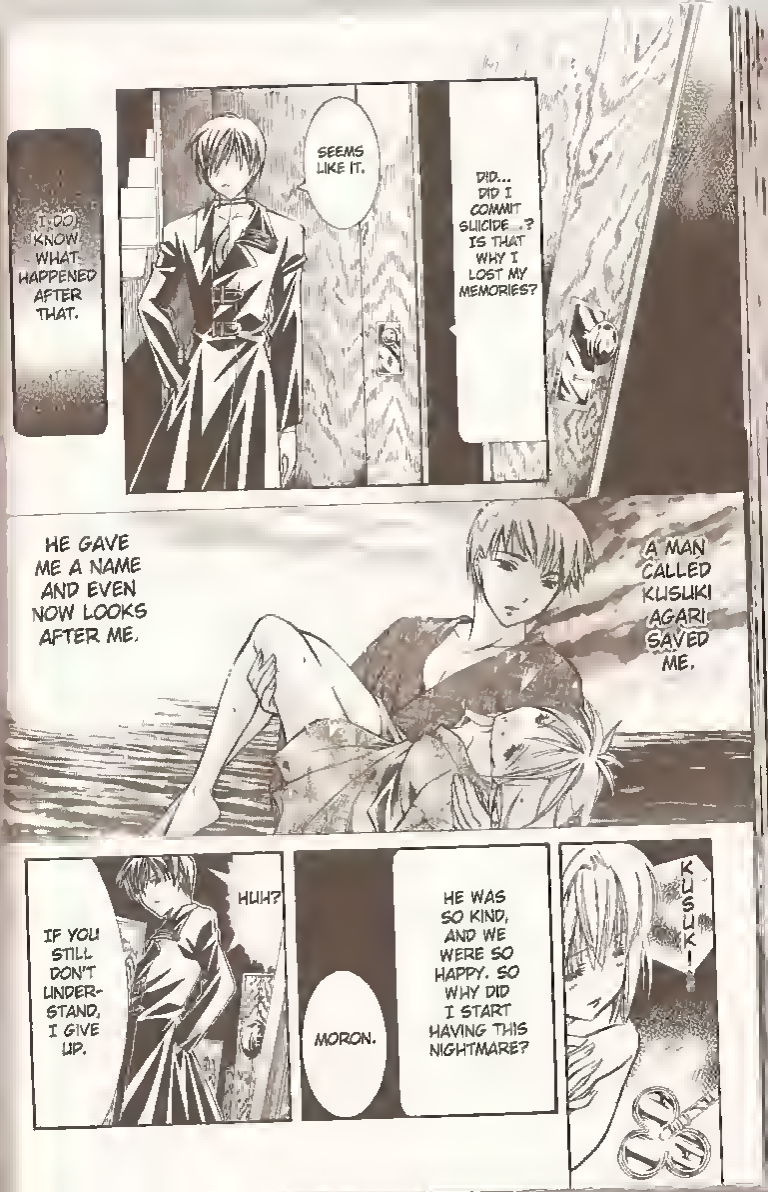

OH NO!
HOW ABOUT THAT DOOR?
THAT'S THE ONLY ONE I GET A BAD FEELING FROM
AH, FINALLY ...
CLICK
ANY DOOR BUT THAT ONE...
HIRUKO, YOU DON'T NEED TO OPEN IT. CAN YOU TRY ANOTHER DOOR?
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
ME WHEN I WAS YOUNG?
I CAN SEE THROUGH THAT!!
I SEE SOMETHING

CLUTCH
WHICH ONE SHALL I TRY?
SO!

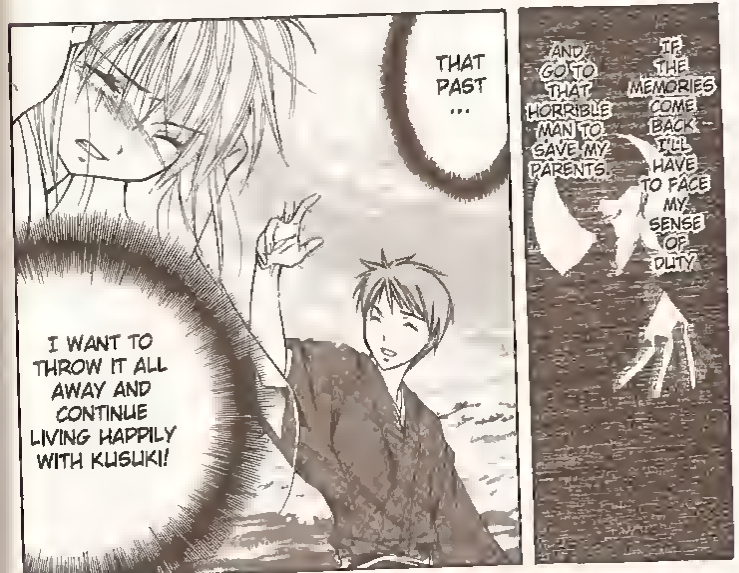

But you said I was your treasure!
CLICK
I'm sorry. We have no choice...
CLICK
You're sending me away to the landlord's son!? Me!? No! He's a vile man!
FATHER... MOTHER... YOU WERE MY TREASURE...
HOW... HOW COULD YOU...!
I just want to die.
I don't want to think anymore.
CLICK
MY THOUGHTS ARE DROWNING...

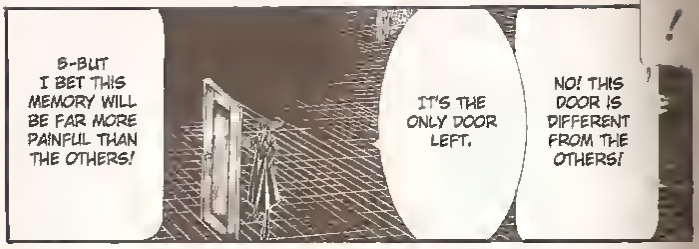
CLICK
We may be poor, but we have you. You're our treasure.
What are we going to do? We have no means of paying...
CLICK
If you have no money, I'll take your daughter instead.
CLICK

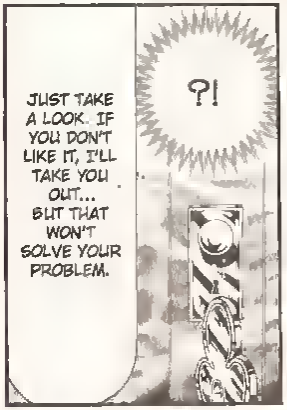

FIRST, THIS DREAM REFLECTS WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART. YOU ALONE ARE THE KEY TO OPEN THOSE DOORS.
SECOND, THERE ARE MEMORIES FROM YOUR PAST THAT YOU SEALED AWAY HOPING TO FORGET. THOSE CAN'T BE OPENED WITHOUT SOMEONE'S HELP.
SO, WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?
BUT IF I TURN THE KEY AND OPEN THE DOOR, THE SEAL WILL BE BROKEN AND ALL YOUR MEMORIES WILL COME BACK.
SO WHEN YOU OPEN YOUR EYES, IT WILL ONLY HAVE SEEMED LIKE A DREAM TO YOU.
AND NOW, YOU'RE JUST VIEWING YOUR PAST.


I DO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT.
SEEMS LIKE IT.
DID... DID I COMMIT SUICIDE...? IS THAT WHY I LOST MY MEMORIES?
HE GAVE ME A NAME AND EVEN NOW LOOKS AFTER ME.
A MAN CALLED KUSUKI AGARI SAVED ME.
IF YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, I GIVE UP.
HUH?
MORON.
HE WAS SO KIND, AND WE WERE SO HAPPY. SO WHY DID I START HAVING THIS NIGHTMARE?
KUSUKI!

"I'M SORRY... WE HAVE NO CHOICE."

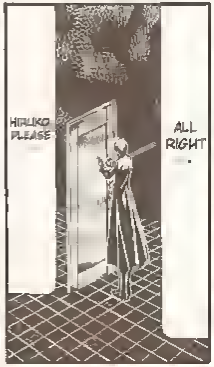

THAT PAST...
I WANT TO THROW IT ALL AWAY AND CONTINUE LIVING HAPPILY WITH KUSUKI!
AND GO TO THAT HORRIBLE MAN TO SAVE MY PARENTS.
IF THE MEMORIES COME BACK... I'LL HAVE TO FACE MY SENSE OF DUTY

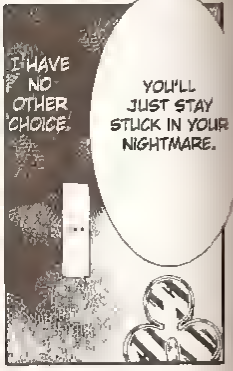

S-BUT I BET THIS MEMORY WILL BE FAR MORE PAINFUL THAN THE OTHERS!
IT'S THE ONLY DOOR LEFT.
NO! THIS DOOR IS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS!
!


JUST TAKE A LOOK. IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, I'LL TAKE YOU OUT... BUT THAT WON'T SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM.
?!

DO YOU ONLY HAVE MEMORIES OF THE PAST?
IT COULD BE THE OPPOSITE.

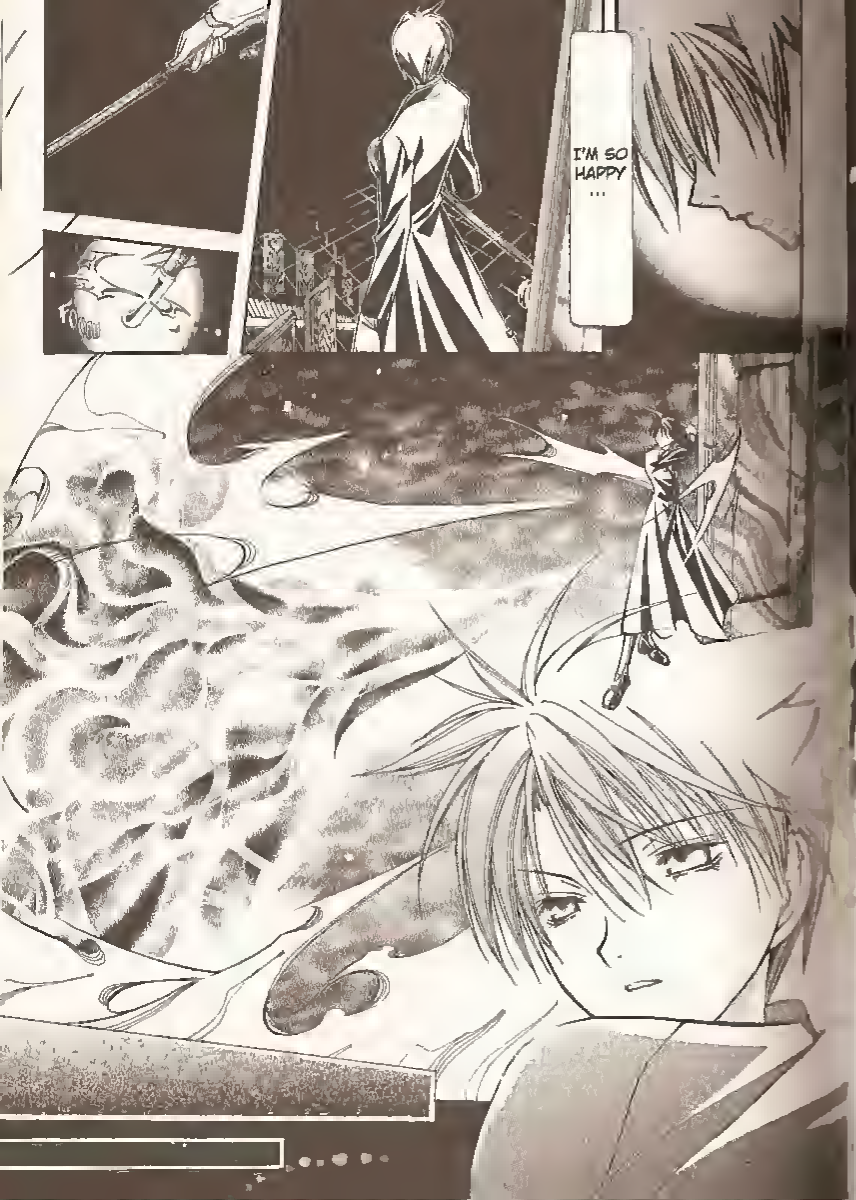
CLICK
THIS ...

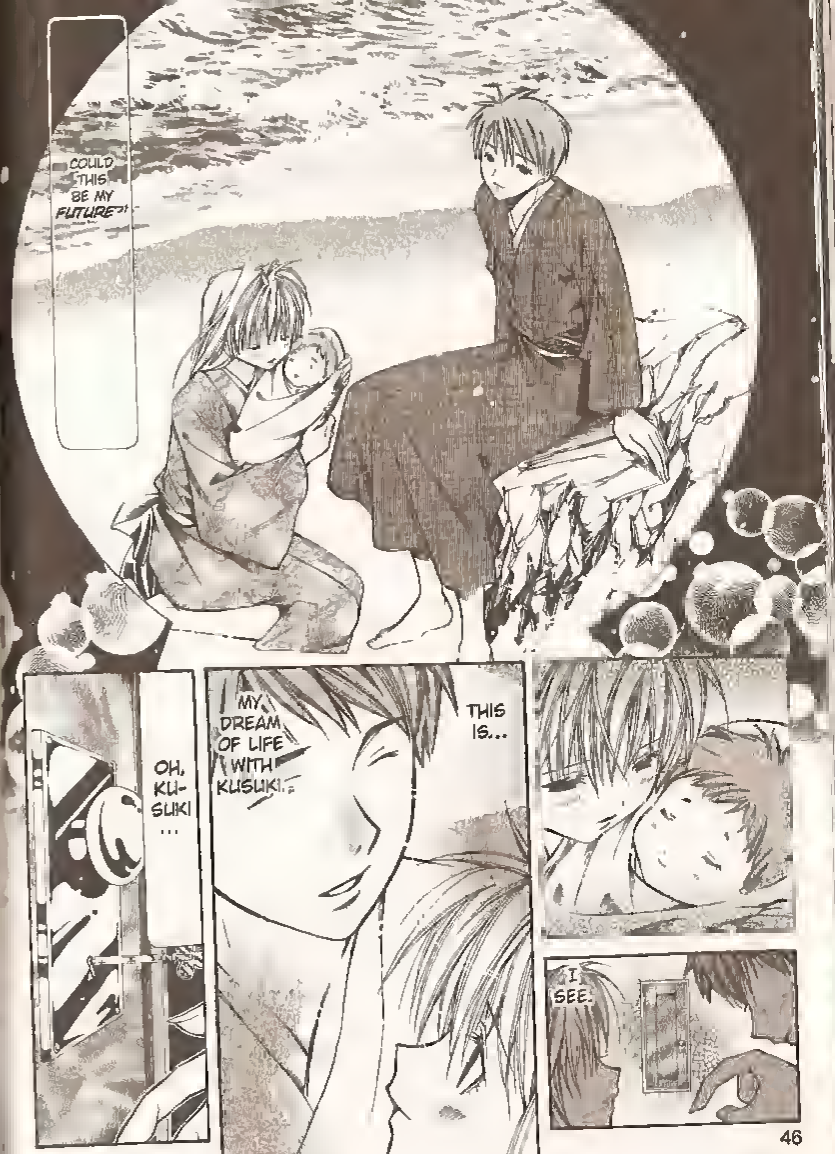

HIRUKO PLEASE
ALL RIGHT.


I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE.
YOU'LL JUST STAY STUCK IN YOUR NIGHTMARE.

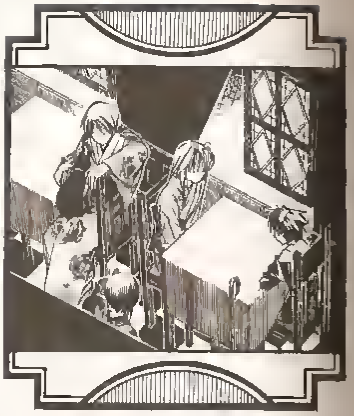
BUT IF I DON'T REMEMBER THEN I'LL KEEP HAVING THE NIGHTMARE, WON'T I?
WHAT IS IT WITH THIS MAN...
I'M TEASING. THE DOOR WON'T OPEN IF YOU DON'T WANT IT TO.
P.REV

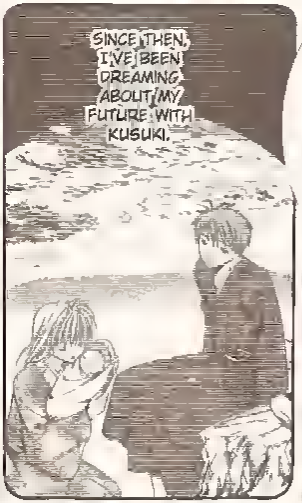
WAIT! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!
WHAT SHOULD I DO? IF I DON'T OPEN ANY DOOR...
?
I THINK WE SHOULD TRY THIS DOOR.

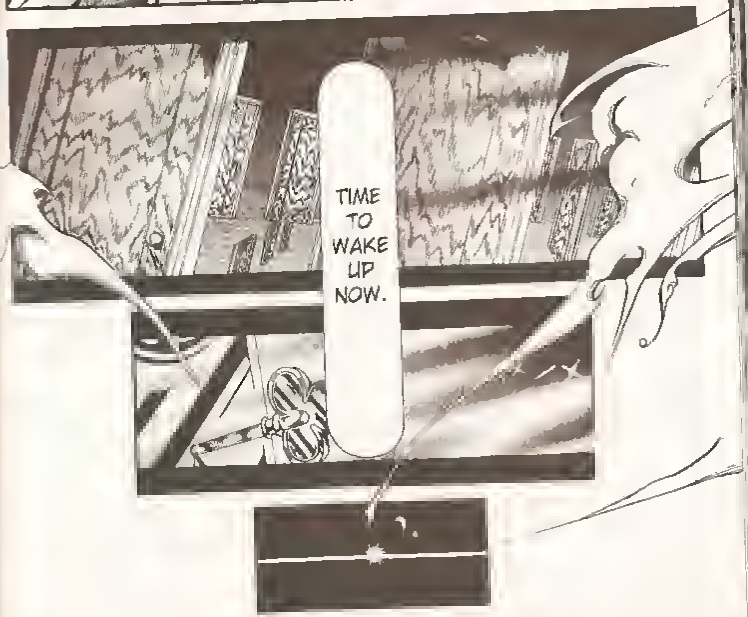

I'M SO HAPPY ...


COULD THIS BE MY FUTURE?!
THIS IS...
MY DREAM OF LIFE WITH KUSUKI...
OH, KU-SUKI ...
I SEE.

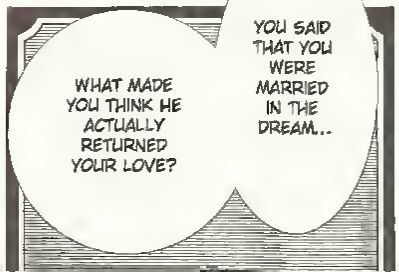
The Twenty-Second Night: The Key (Part Two)



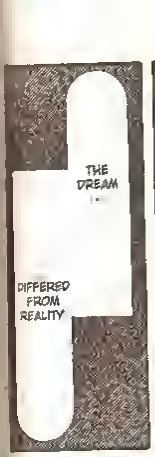


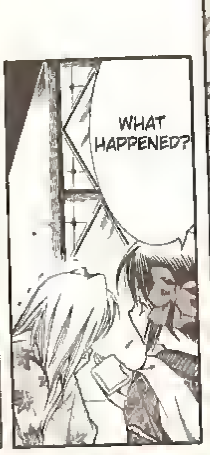


CLATTER
AS HIS SUCCESSOR, YOU'D BETTER TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS!
I NEED YOU TO ENTER MY DREAM AND TAKE ME OUT OF THAT DOOR!


YOU SAID THAT YOU WERE MARRIED IN THE DREAM...
WHAT MADE YOU THINK HE ACTUALLY RETURNED YOUR LOVE?

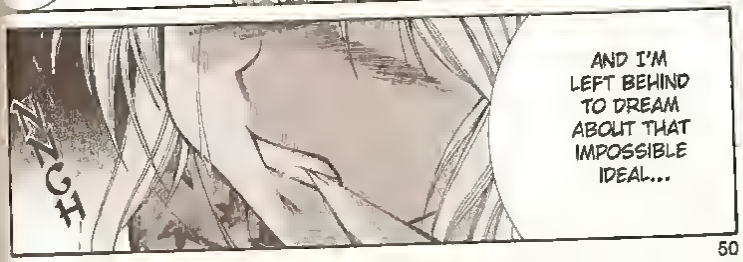
LOOK AT HOW WRETCHED AND MISERABLE I AM!
IT'S ALL YOUR BROTHER'S FAULT! HE LED ME TO THAT DOOR!

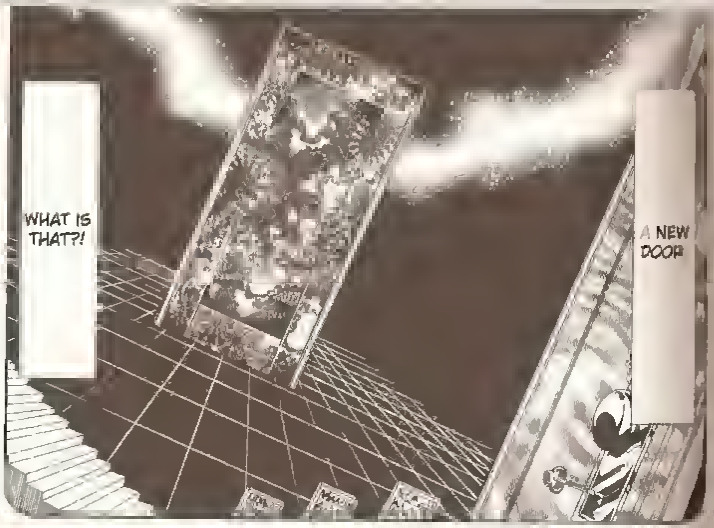

THE DREAM
DIFFERED FROM REALITY


WHAT HAPPENED?

IT'S TORTURING ME NOW!

HE WENT OFF WITH ANOTHER GIRL...
...TO START A FAMILY WITH HER!
WE WERE MARRIED IN THE DREAM, BUT IN REAL LIFE, KUSUKI LEFT ME.


AND I'M LEFT BEHIND TO DREAM ABOUT THAT IMPOSSIBLE IDEAL...


WHAT IS THAT?!
A NEW DOOR

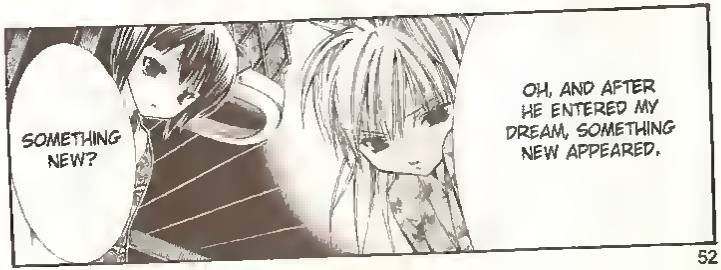
PRE-DICTING ...?
YES.
HE WAS PROBABLY PREDICTING ...
THAT YOU WOULD COME BACK HERE.

YES...
HIRUKO, COULD IT BE...?

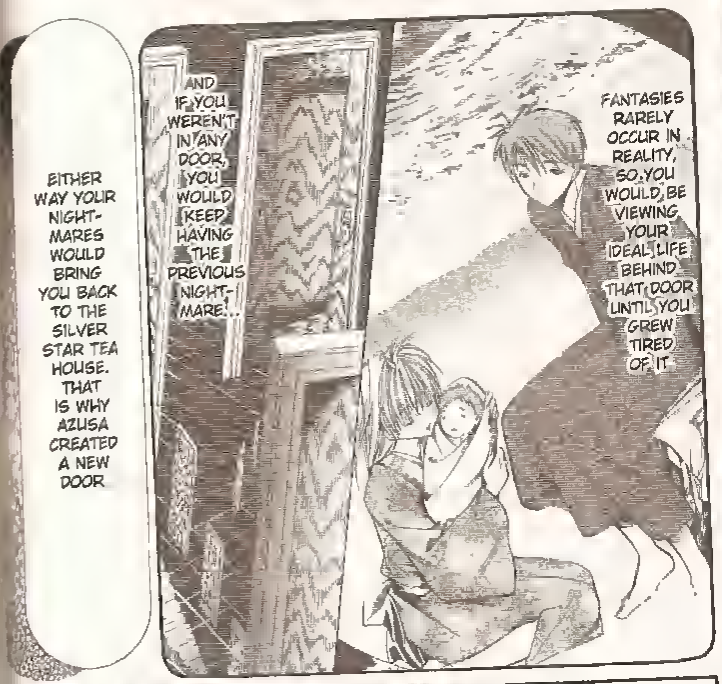
Not something I would do
AZUSA MADE THAT DOOR... BUT I DON'T REMEMBER WHY.

I'M GETTING TIRED OF YOU.
GRP
TSK TSK. YOU'RE AS SELFISH AS EVER.

YOU'RE JUST AS COLD AS THE LAST BAKU!
AND YOU!


SOMETHING NEW?
OH, AND AFTER HE ENTERED MY DREAM, SOMETHING NEW APPEARED.

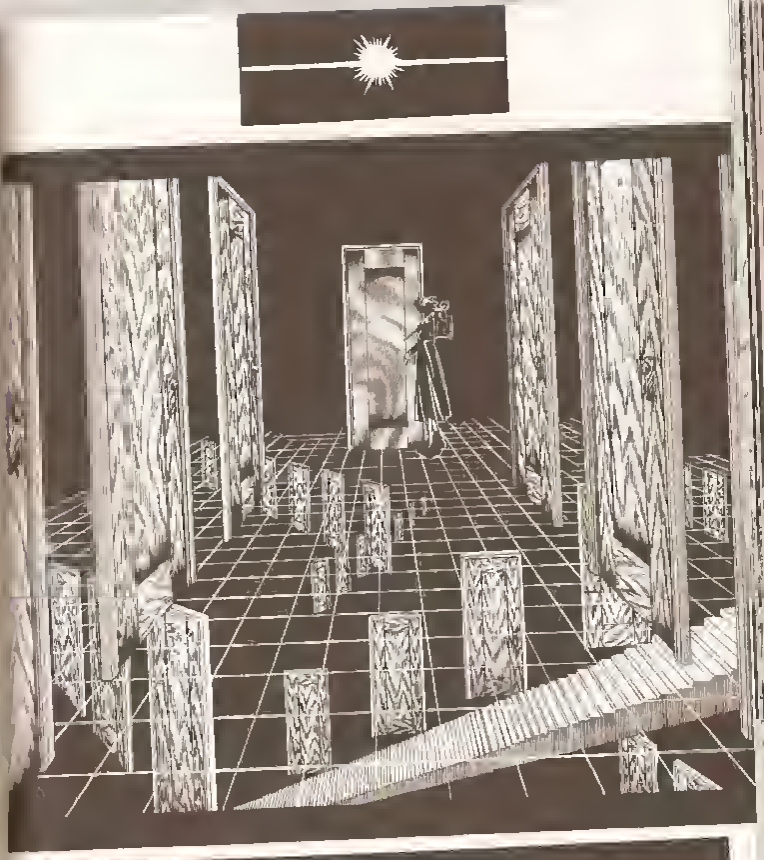
FOOSH
LET'S START BY TAKING YOU OUT OF YOUR IDEAL DOOR.
SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

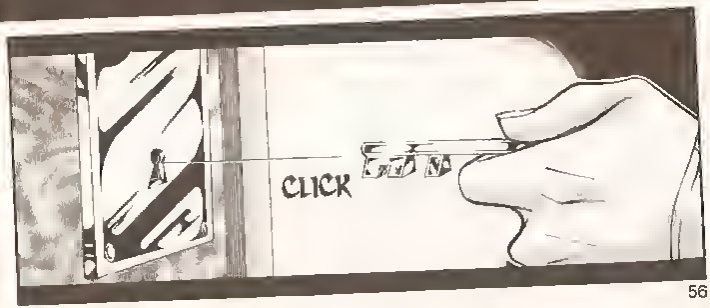

EITHER WAY YOUR NIGHT-MARES WOULD BRING YOU BACK TO THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE. THAT IS WHY AZUSA CREATED A NEW DOOR
AND IF YOU WEREN'T IN ANY DOOR, YOU WOULD KEEP HAVING THE PREVIOUS NIGHT-MARE!..
FANTASIES RARELY OCCUR IN REALITY, SO, YOU WOULD BE VIEWING YOUR IDEAL LIFE BEHIND THAT DOOR UNTIL YOU GREW TIRED OF IT

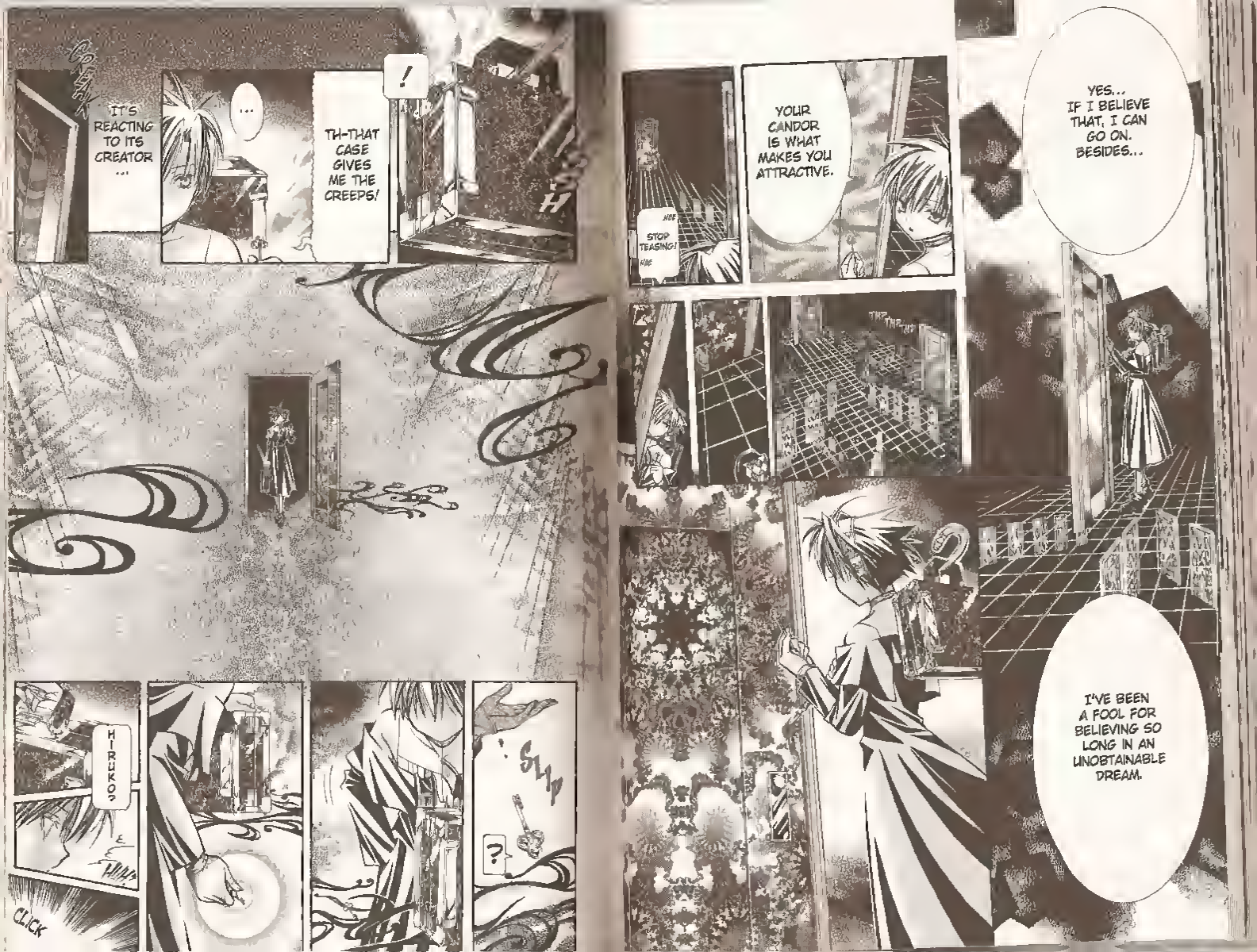
THAT'S SO MEAN! TO TOY WITH PEOPLE'S DREAMS! YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!

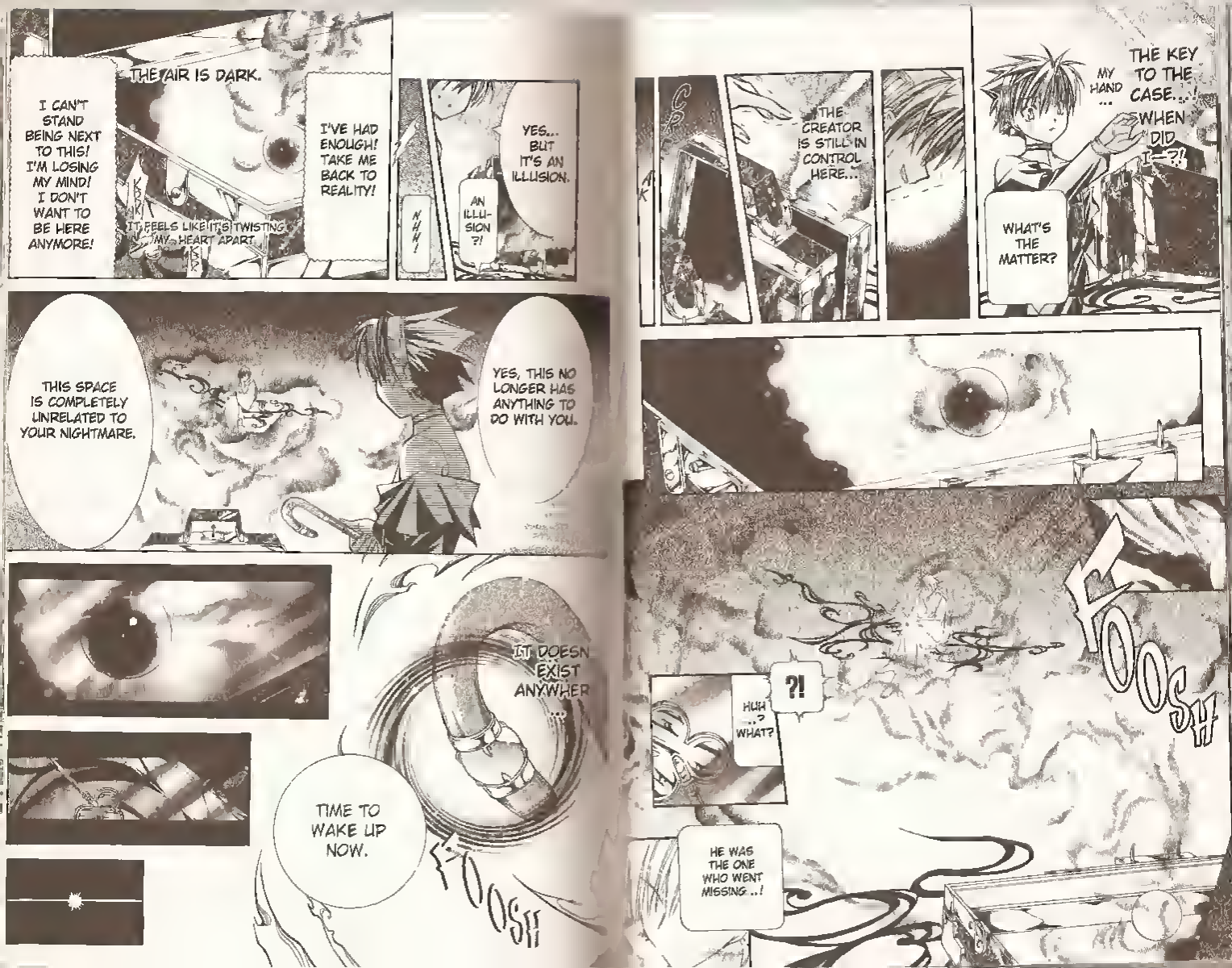
I SUPPOSE.

THERE'S NOWHERE FOR ME TO GO...
MY MEMORIES OF THE PAST... NOR MY HOPES FOR THE FUTURE..
NOW I HAVE NOTHING LEFT..
ARE YOU HAPPY NOW?
SIGH
SIGH
WHAT?
YOU SPEAK AS IF YOUR LIFE IS OVER.
A NEW IDEAL...
NEW HOPES AND NEW ENCOUNTERS WILL CREATE A DOOR WITH A NEW IDEAL FOR YOU.
KAGARI, YOUR FUTURE STARTS FROM HERE AND GOES ON.




CLICK

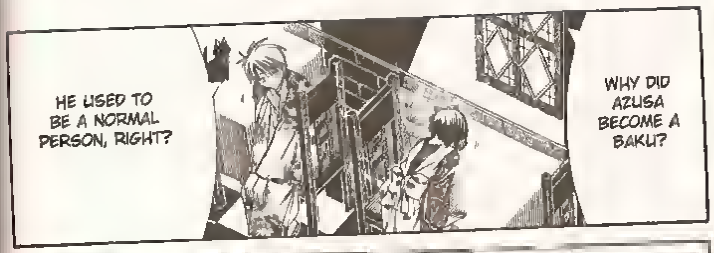

IT'S REACTING TO ITS CREATOR ...
...
TH-THAT CASE GIVES ME THE CREEPS!
!
HIRUKO?
CLICK
SLIP
?
STOP TEASING!
YOUR CANDOR IS WHAT MAKES YOU ATTRACTIVE.
YES... IF I BELIEVE THAT, I CAN GO ON. BESIDES...
I'VE BEEN A FOOL FOR BELIEVING SO LONG IN AN UNOBTAINABLE DREAM.


I CAN'T STAND BEING NEXT TO THIS! I'M LOSING MY MIND! I DON'T WANT TO BE HERE ANYMORE!
THE AIR IS DARK.
KSK
IT FEELS LIKE IT'S TWISTING MY HEART APART.
KSK
I'VE HAD ENOUGH! TAKE ME BACK TO REALITY!
NHH!
AN ILLU-SION ?!
YES... BUT IT'S AN ILLUSION.
THIS SPACE IS COMPLETELY UNRELATED TO YOUR NIGHTMARE.
YES, THIS NO LONGER HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOU.
IT DOESN EXIST ANYWHER ...
TIME TO WAKE UP NOW.
FOOSH
THE CREATOR IS STILL IN CONTROL HERE...
MY HAND ...
THE KEY TO THE CASE...! WHEN DID I—?!
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
FOOSH
?!
HUH ...? WHAT?
HE WAS THE ONE WHO WENT MISSING ..!

銀星館
I HAVE TO KEEP BELIEVING IN MY FUTURE..
GOODBYE...
DING
MIZUKI...
HIFUMI, DID YOU HEAR THAT?
IT'S AZUSA ...
SHE SAID AZUSA WAS THERE ...
YOUR BROTHER IS STILL...
MIZUKI ...

THAT CASE...
OH, KAGARI! HIRUKO DIDN'T COME BACK WITH YOU?
?!
HIRUKO IS WITH YOUR BROTHER ...
CASE?
YEAH ...
CLATTER
I DON'T WANT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THOSE FREAKS!
IT'S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH ME!
AZUSA?
WHAT—?
I DON'T KNOW!
RING
MY HEAD!
YES... HE GOT RID OF MY NIGHTMARE.

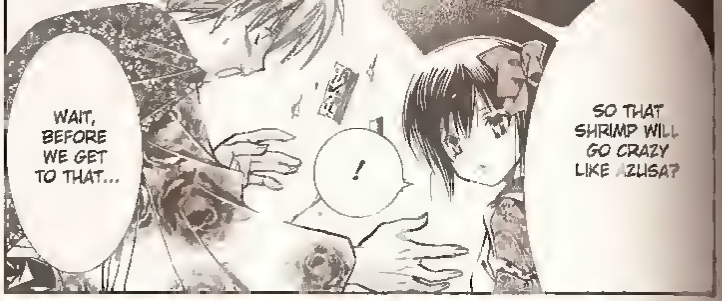
HIS HANDS WERE COLDER THAN BEFORE, BUT HE ALWAYS MANAGED TO WARM MY HEART.
HE WAS SO KIND TO ME.
BUT EVEN SO, AZUSA ALWAYS COM-FORTED ME.
THAT WAS ALL THAT MATTERED...
BUT...
HIS APPEARANCE —DIDN'T CHANGE, BUT HE COULDN'T EAT— ANYTHING BUT NIGHT-MARES!
AZUSA THEN BECAME A BAKU!
HE WASN'T MY BROTHER OR EVEN A PERSON ANYMORE!

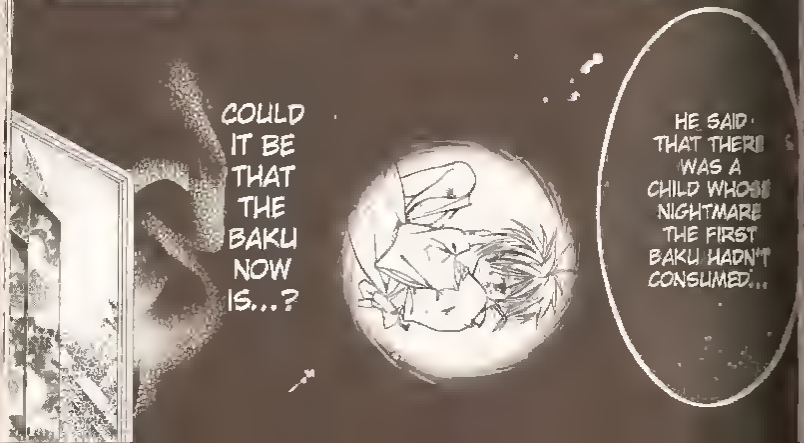


FIVE YEARS AGO A MONSTER CAME TO AZUSA.
A MONSTER?
OR BOUND TO THE BLOOD-LINES THAT RAN IN HIM...
YES .. HE WAS. BUT HE DIDN'T WANT TO BE A PERSON ANYMORE...

THE VERY FIRST BAKU, HIRUKO.

BUT HE COULD NEITHER BE BORN NOR DIE SO HE PASSED ON HIS ABILITIES AND MEMORIES TO AZUSA, AND ERASED HIS OWN CONSCIOUSNESS.
HE LONGED FOR HIS OWN DESTRUCTION.



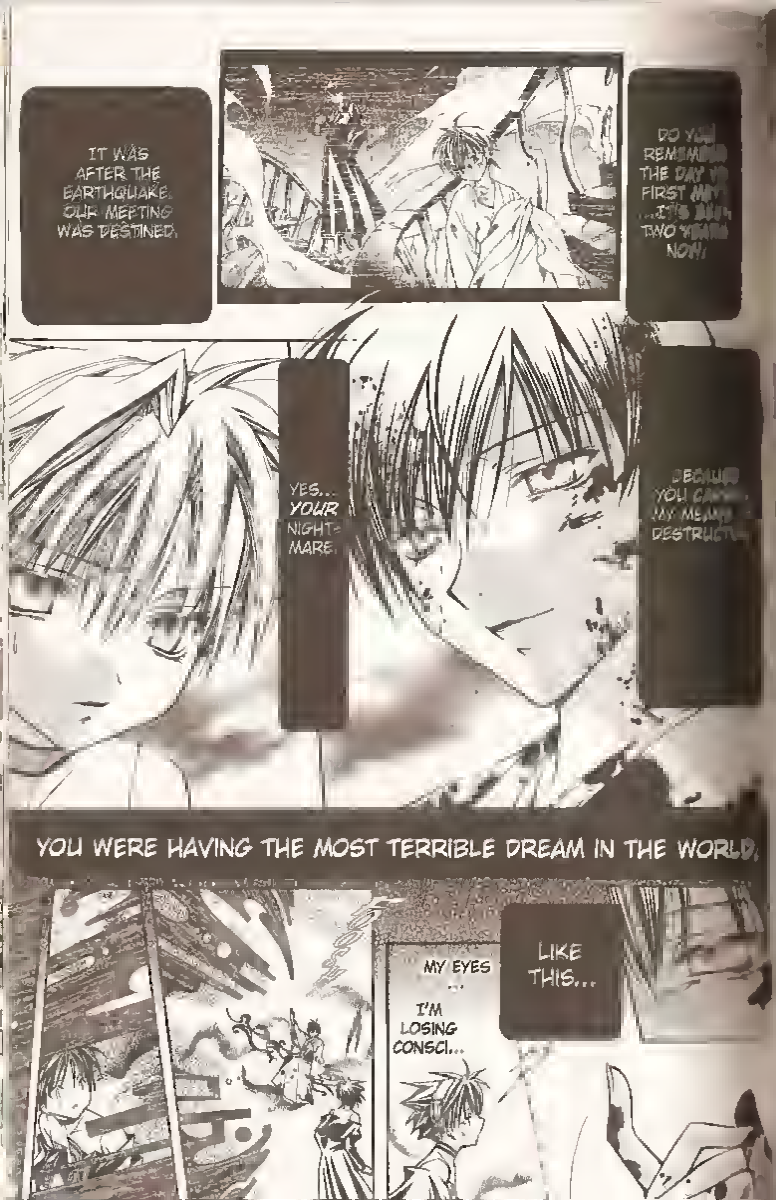


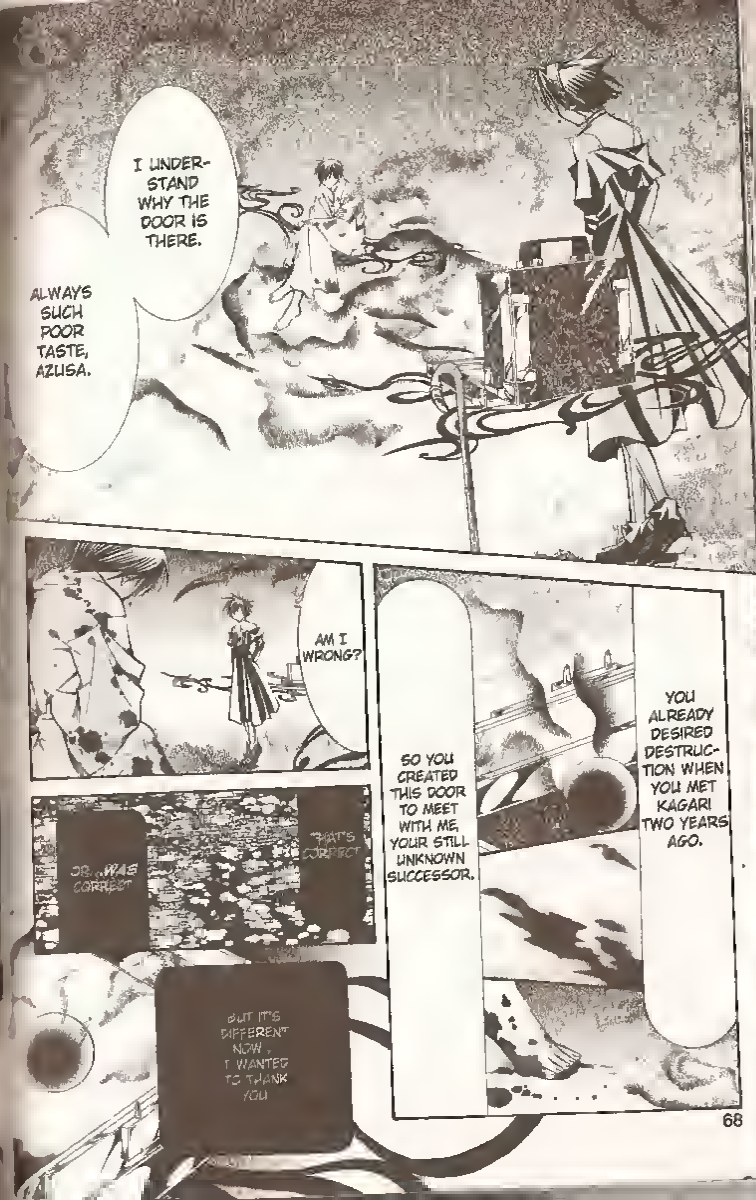
EVENTUALLY THE THOUGHTS THAT CAME WITH BEING A BAKU TOOK THEIR TOLL AND HE STARTED TO GO CRAZY.

EVEN THOUGH HE COULD NEVER BE BORN NOR DIE, HIS APPETITE FOR NIGHTMARES ONLY INCREASED...

BUT THIS CREATED AN UNFATHOMABLE FEELING OF EMPTINESS, AND HE LONGED FOR DEATH LIKE THE FIRST BAKU HAD.

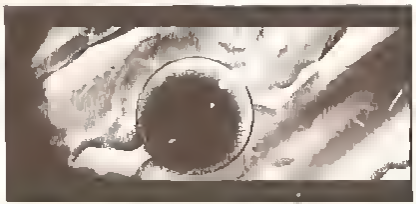
WAIT A SECOND—!
...AND THE CURRENT HIRUKO TOOK HIS PLACE.
AZUSA DISAP-PEARED FROM THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE.
THEN ONE DAY TWO YEARS AGO...


IT WAS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE. OUR MEETING WAS DESTINED.
DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY WE FIRST MET? ...IT'S BEEN TWO YEARS NOW.
YES... YOUR NIGHTMARE.
BECAUSE YOU CARRIED MY MEANS OF DESTRUCTION.
YOU WERE HAVING THE MOST TERRIBLE DREAM IN THE WORLD.
MY EYES... I'M LOSING CONSCI...
LIKE THIS...


I UNDERSTAND WHY THE DOOR IS THERE.
ALWAYS SUCH POOR TASTE, AZUSA.
AM I WRONG?
SO YOU CREATED THIS DOOR TO MEET WITH ME, YOUR STILL UNKNOWN SUCCESSOR.
YOU ALREADY DESIRED DESTRUCTION WHEN YOU MET KAGARI TWO YEARS AGO.
OH...I WAS CORRECT
THAT'S CORRECT
BUT IT'S DIFFERENT NOW... I WANTED TO THANK YOU

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY MY PREDECESSOR HELD BACK...
IT'S SUCH A GOOD PLACE... FOR ME.
VIOLENCE, DECEPTION, DEBAUCHERY, POVERTY... THEY'RE ALL SMALL WAVES IN THE VAST SEA OF DARKNESS.
YOUR DREAM IS LIKE THAT.
YOU KNOW HOW THE SEA IS SO BIG THAT IT SWALLOWS EVERYTHING?
IT EVEN SANK MY ROTTING MIND DEEPER INTO MADNESS.
?!
LOOK IT'S GOING TO JUMP OUT OF THE SCREEN AT ANY MOMENT

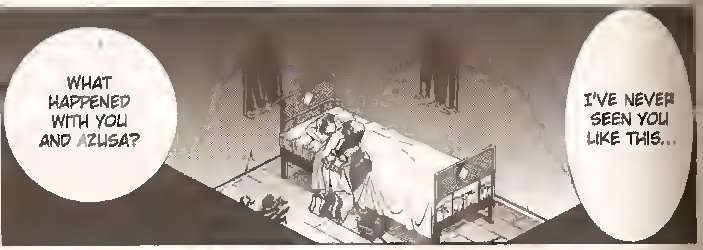
POOR CHITOSE..
LONG, BLESSED LIFE. YOUR NAME REALLY DOESN'T SU
WHY DON'T WE GO NOW? AS YOU SAID THIS PLACE IS USELESS..
HEH HEH SORRY I MADE YOU REMEMBER TOO MUCH I ONLY WANTED TO THANK YOU.

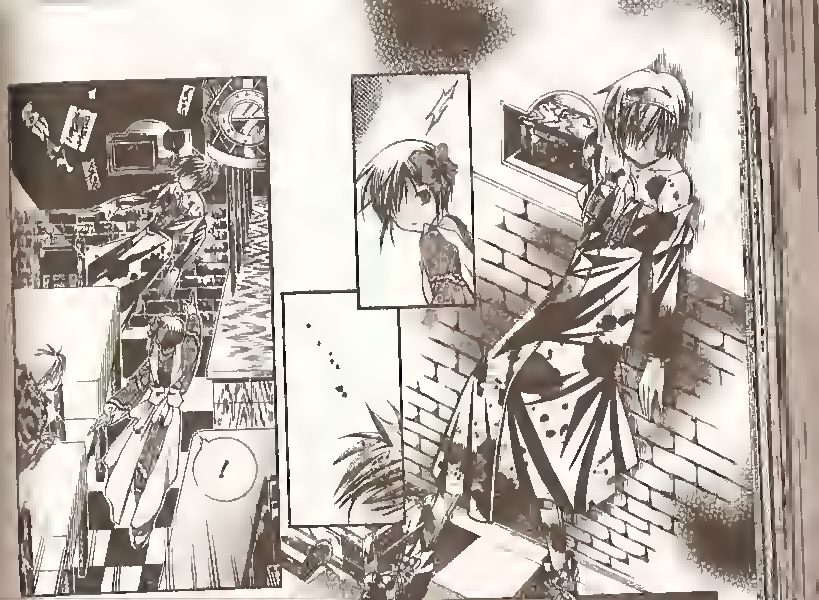


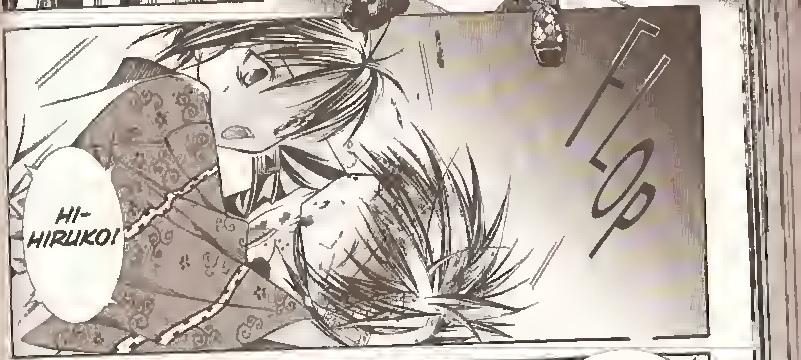
YOU HAVE SOMEWHERE TO RETURN TO, AS DO I...

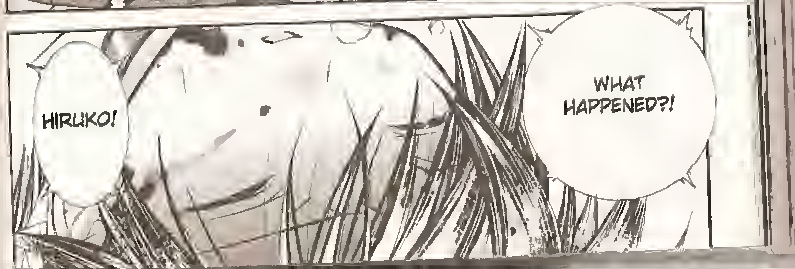
CHITOSE KUROSU ...
ARE YOU AFRAID OF THIS DREAM?
DO YOU REMEMBER NOW?
PLEASE...
S...
STOP...
...OR IS IT BECAUSE IT REMINDS YOU OF YOUR PAINFUL PAST?
STOP!
WHY...?
HEH HEH.. YOU'VE TRIED TO AVOID IT EVER SINCE, HAVEN'T YOU?

The Twenty-Third Night: Reasons



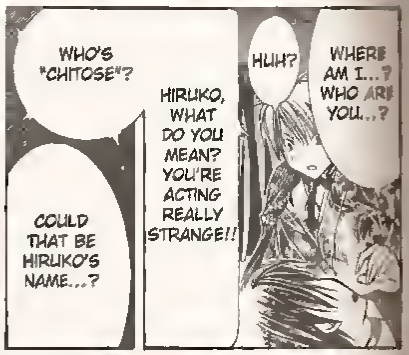




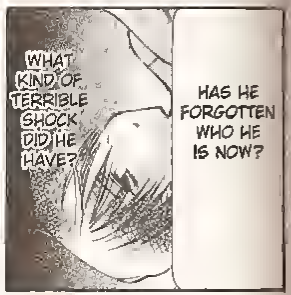


?!
I'M CHITOSE

HIS REAL NAME? BEFORE HE BECAME A BAKU?
!


WHO'S "CHITOSE"?
COULD THAT BE HIRUKO'S NAME...?
HIRUKO, WHAT DO YOU MEAN? YOU'RE ACTING REALLY STRANGE!!
HUH?
WHERE AM I...? WHO ARE YOU...?

BUT HOW?
WE NEED TO HELP HIM REMEMBER THAT HE'S HIRUKO!

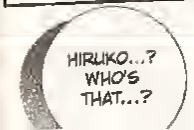

WHAT KIND OF TERRIBLE SHOCK DID HE HAVE?
HAS HE FORGOTTEN WHO HE IS NOW?

?!
HERE.

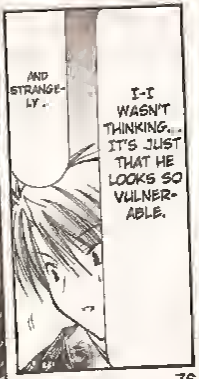
A BAKU CAN'T EAT ANYTHING BUT NIGHTMARES! HE'LL COUGH UP BLOOD!
HIFUMI! DON'T!

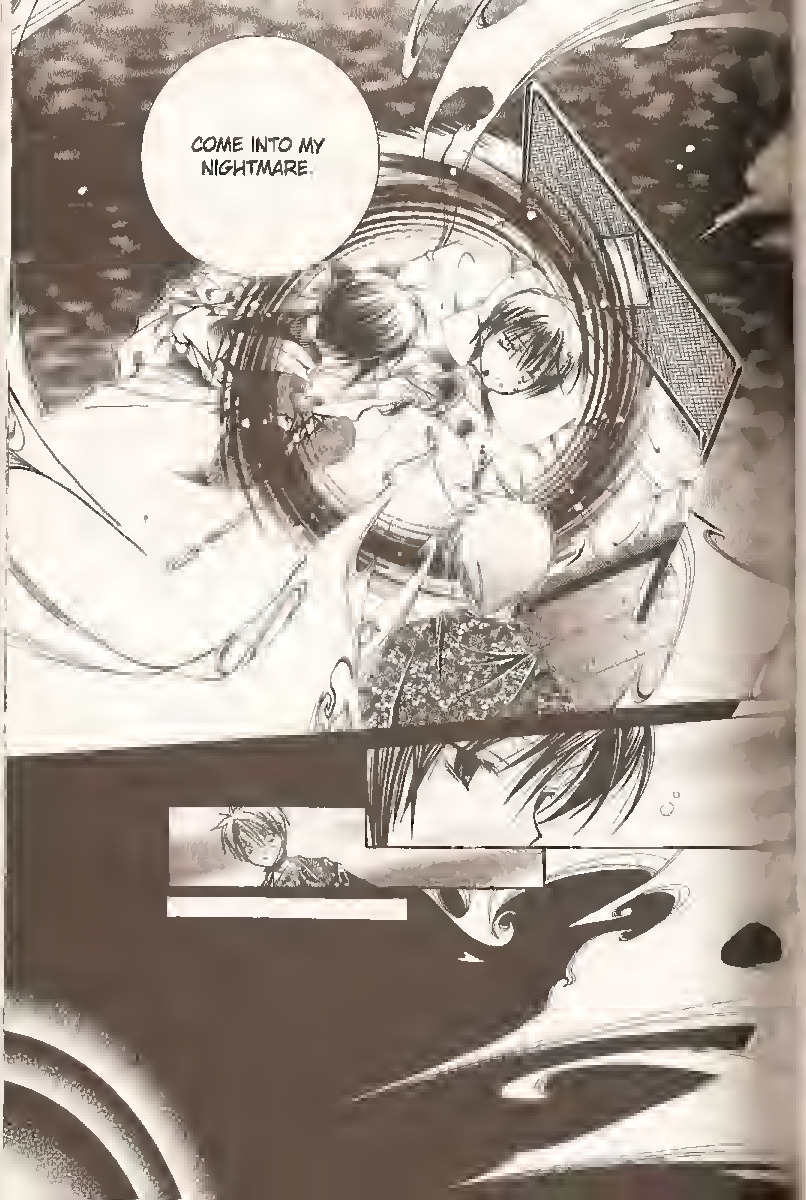
HIRUKO? WHAT IS IT?!
YES...

WHAT?


HIRUKO...? WHO'S THAT...?

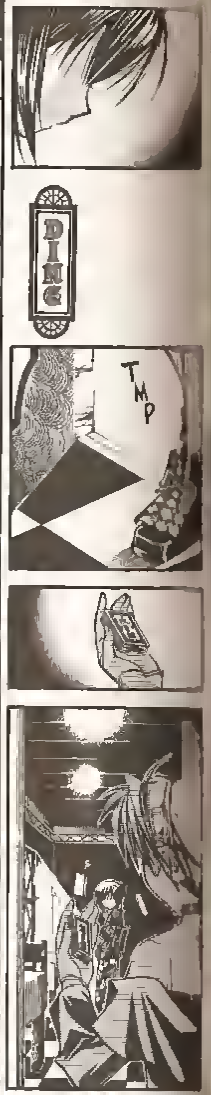
HE LOOKED LIKE HE WANTED TO EAT IT...

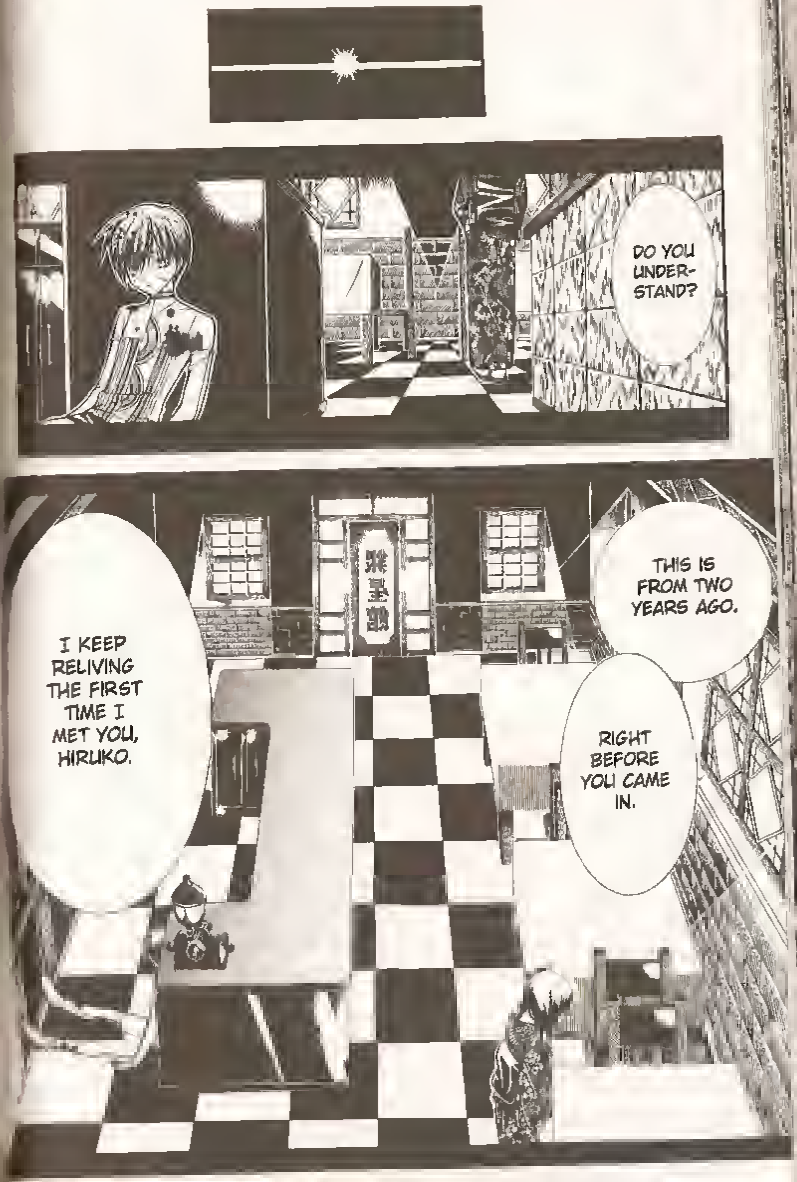

I-I WASN'T THINKING... IT'S JUST THAT HE LOOKS SO VULNERABLE.
AND STRANGELY.


COME INTO MY NIGHTMARE.

YES, FOR THE SAKE OF BUSINESS HE CAN'T STAY LIKE THIS.
BUT WHOSE NIGHT-MARE ...?
A BAKU EATS NIGHTMARES, SO MAYBE IF WE MAKE HIM EAT ONE HE'LL START TO REMEMBER...
I'VE BEEN HAVING IT FOR A WHILE.
I'LL GIVE YOU MY NIGHT-MARE ...
YOU'LL UNDER-STAND WHY I NEVER TOLD YOU ABOUT IT...
...

HIRUKO.
WELCOME HOME...
...MIZUKI?
ARE YOU ...


DING
TMP

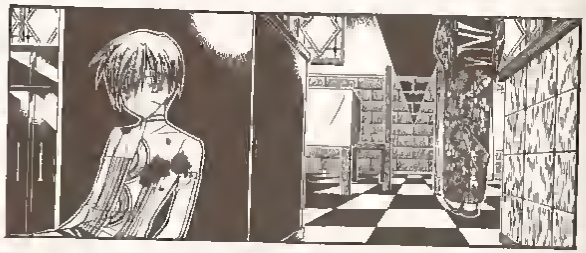

DO YOU UNDER-STAND?
I KEEP RELIVING THE FIRST TIME I MET YOU, HIRUKO.
THIS IS FROM TWO YEARS AGO.
RIGHT BEFORE YOU CAME IN.

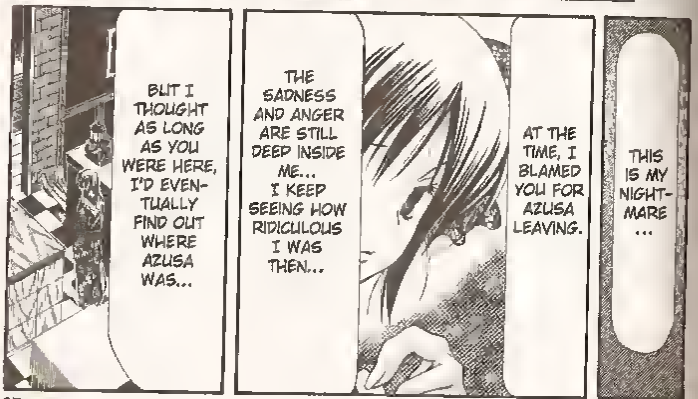
IT'S ALL RIGHT. YOU'RE WELCOME HERE.
...
WHY DID YOU COME HERE.
WHY DON'T YOU HAVE A SEAT?
OH!
THE SEAT AZUSA ALWAYS SAT IN!
?
AH.
YOU HAVE HIS MEMORIES...
OF COURSE YOU'D CHOOSE THAT ONE.

YOU'RE HERE TO REPLACE AZUSA, RIGHT?
I UNDERSTAND...
WHAT'S THAT...?
A CASE?
THE CANE, THE CLOTHES
YOUR EYES, YOUR HAIR COLOR...
YOU'RE THE SAME.
IT GIVES ME THE CHILLS...
THAT CASE...!
SHUDDER
CHUNK
THAT'S NOT RIGHT! I'LL THROW IT AWAY, OKAY?!
HUH?
AZUSA NEVER CARRIED A CASE!
SNAP

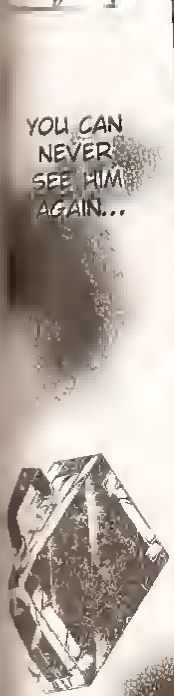
GULP
!
KOFF
KOFF
HA HA
YES... YOU REALLY ARE...
HUFF
HUFF
I'M NOT AZUSA.
THEN...
YOU SHOULD FORGET HIM... HE'S—
YOUR MEMORIES OF HIM WEREN'T GOOD ONES.
STILL, YOU WANT TO HOLD...
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SIMILARITIES BETWEEN AZUSA WHEN HE WAS THE BAKU AND ME, THE NEW BAKU...
AND ARE TRYING TO FILL THE EMPTINESS INSIDE BY RECALLING ALL THE DETAILS.
...
?!
HERE YOU ARE.
WHY DID YOU GIVE THAT TO ME KNOWING I'LL COUGH UP BLOOD?
I CAN'T DRINK COFFEE
I SEE...

THERE'S NOTHING MORE I CAN SAY TO YOU.

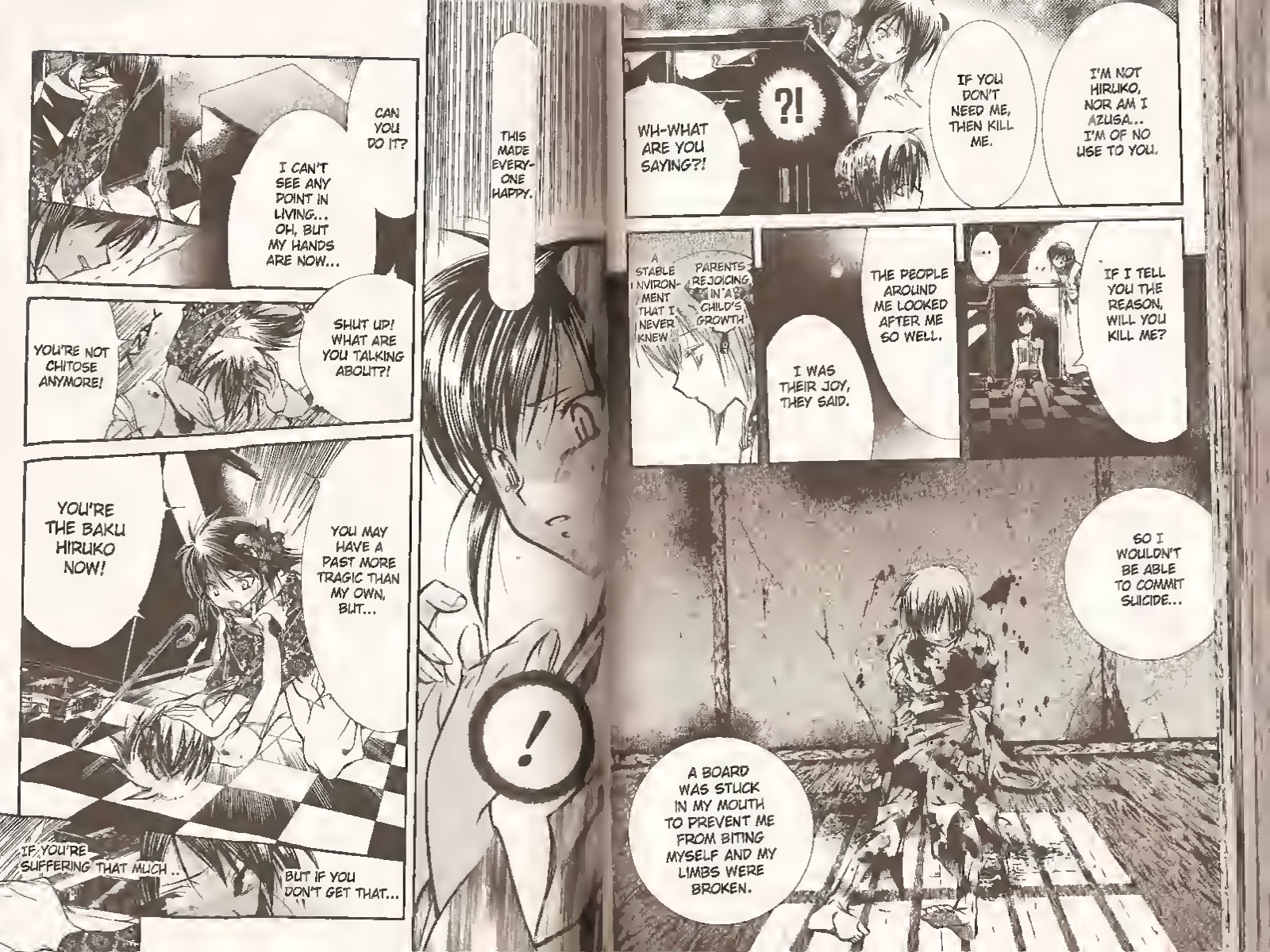



BUT I THOUGHT AS LONG AS YOU WERE HERE, I'D EVENTUALLY FIND OUT WHERE AZUSA WAS...
THE SADNESS AND ANGER ARE STILL DEEP INSIDE ME... I KEEP SEEING HOW RIDICULOUS I WAS THEN...
AT THE TIME, I BLAMED YOU FOR AZUSA LEAVING.
THIS IS MY NIGHTMARE ...

WHERE ...


YOU CAN NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN...

IF ONLY YOU DIDN'T EXIST!
THEN, WHO ARE YOU?!
WHY DID YOU TAKE AZUSA FROM ME?!
WHY DID YOU BECOME THE BAKU?! HOW DID YOU BECOME THE NEW BAKU?!
WHERE IS AZUSA?!
...


CAN YOU DO IT?
I CAN'T SEE ANY POINT IN LIVING... OH, BUT MY HANDS ARE NOW...
SHUT UP! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
YOU'RE NOT CHITOSE ANYMORE!
YOU'RE THE BAKU HIRUKO NOW!
YOU MAY HAVE A PAST MORE TRAGIC THAN MY OWN, BUT...
IF YOU'RE SUFFERING THAT MUCH...
BUT IF YOU DON'T GET THAT...
THIS MADE EVERY-ONE HAPPY.
!
WH-WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!
?!
IF YOU DON'T NEED ME, THEN KILL ME.
I'M NOT HIRUKO, NOR AM I AZUSA... I'M OF NO USE TO YOU.
A STABLE ENVIRON-MENT THAT I NEVER KNEW
PARENTS REJOICING IN A CHILD'S GROWTH
I WAS THEIR JOY, THEY SAID.
THE PEOPLE AROUND ME LOOKED AFTER ME SO WELL.
...
IF I TELL YOU THE REASON, WILL YOU KILL ME?
SO I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO COMMIT SUICIDE...
A BOARD WAS STUCK IN MY MOUTH TO PREVENT ME FROM BITING MYSELF AND MY LIMBS WERE BROKEN.

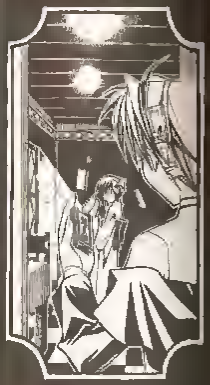
...NGH.
AH...

THEN I'LL DO WHAT YOU WANT.
I'LL KILL YOU WITH MY OWN HANDS, CHITOSE...

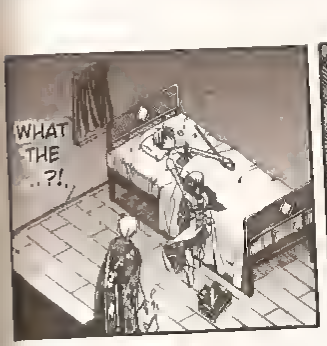
PLEASE ... DON'T CLING TO THE PAST ANY-MORE ...

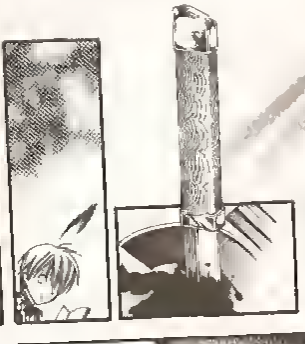
PART OF ME BLAMED YOU, BUT YOU'RE STILL IMPORTANT TO ME. I NEED YOU.

AZUSA'S MEMORIES LIVE INSIDE THE BAKU SO IT'S LIKE A PART OF HIM IS STILL HERE.

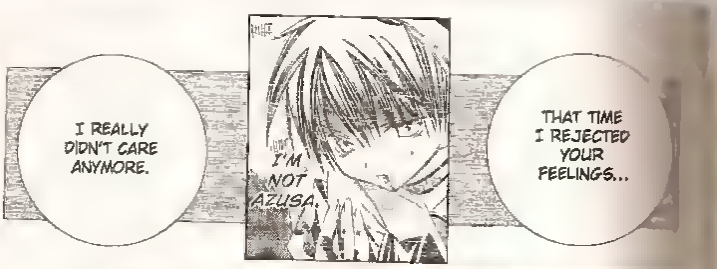


AZUSA'S CONSCIOUSNESS SHOULDN'T HAVE PASSED ON, BUT YOU CAME TO THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE ANYWAY...

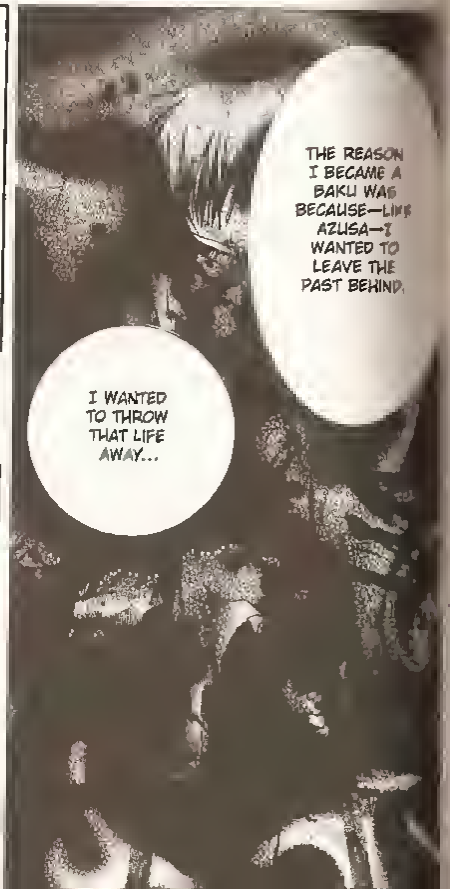


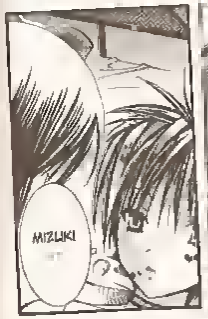


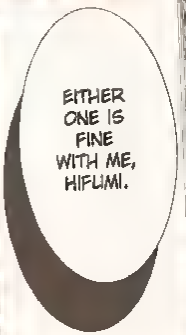
YOU SAID YOU SAW NO POINT IN LIVING... BUT I'VE ALWAYS NEEDED YOU...



ANYONE BUT CHITOSE...



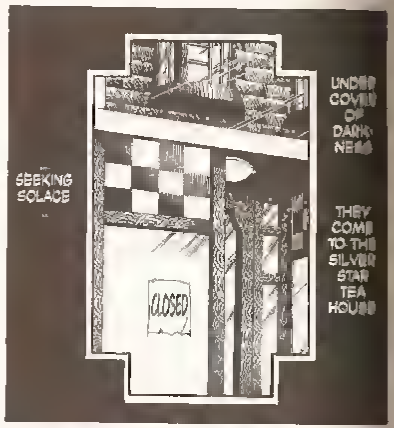


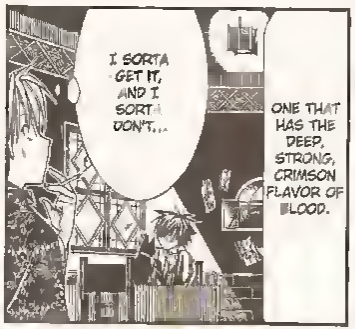


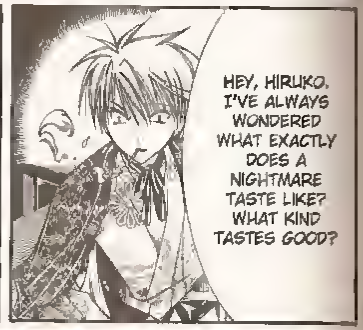
THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING, MIZUKI...
NO...
IS THIS FROM AZUSA'S MEMORIES?
I...
I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHO HIRUKO IS ANYMORE.
I NEVER REALIZED THAT YOU HAD A TRAGIC PAST... YOU NEVER LET ON... INSTEAD...
YOU'RE JUST LIKE THE OLD BAKU!
I DON'T KNOW...

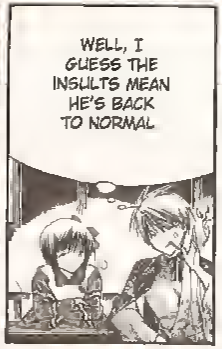
BUT FOR SOME REASON, MY HEART FEELS WHOLE.
LIKE BEFORE...
...AND THE EMPTINESS FROM YOUR PAST.
INSIDE HERE IS THE BLAME I PUT ON YOU...
HIRUKO, YOU NEED TO SEE YOURSELF AS YOU ARE NOW...
...AND THE WAY TO BRING HIM BACK.
KNOWING THAT MIGHT HELP ME FIND OUT WHERE HE IS NOW...
...UNTIL YOU'RE READY TO TELL ME HOW YOU TOOK OVER BEING THE BAKU FROM AZUSA.
I'LL LET GO OF THE ANGER... AND I'LL WAIT...

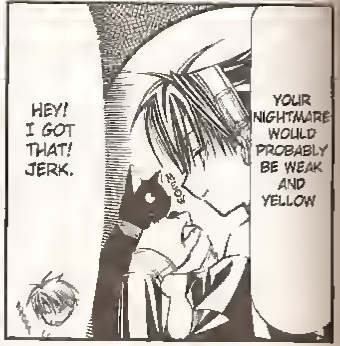
THE TWENTY-FOURTH NIGHT: LETTERS





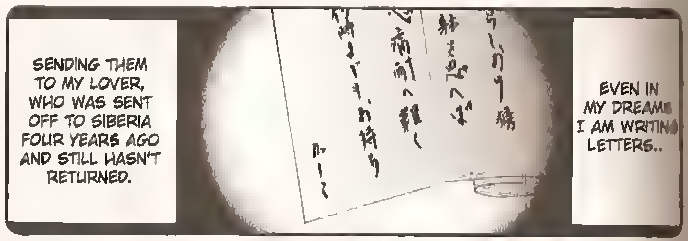


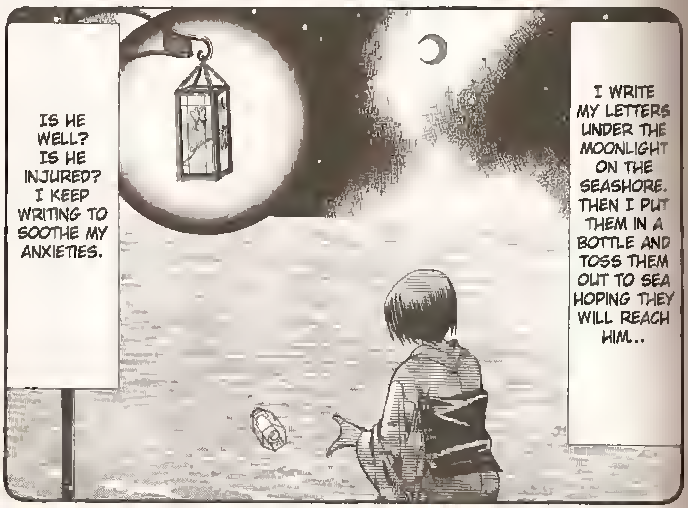


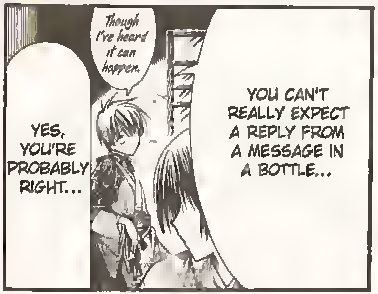


I'M NO LONGER CHITOSE.

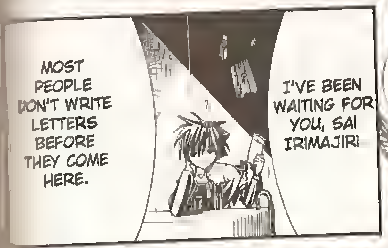
I'M NOT CHITOSE...

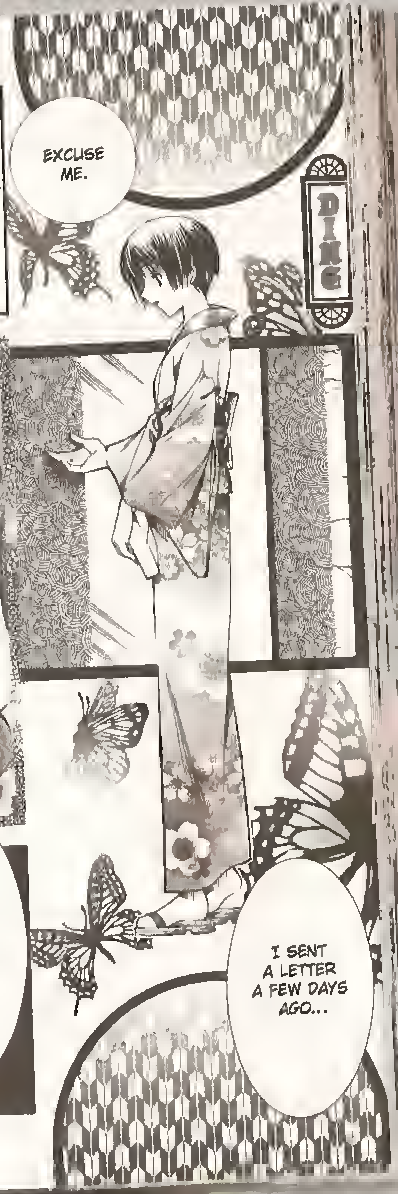

SENDING THEM TO MY LOVER, WHO WAS SENT OFF TO SIBERIA FOUR YEARS AGO AND STILL HASN'T RETURNED.
EVEN IN MY DREAMS I AM WRITING LETTERS..


IS HE WELL? IS HE INJURED? I KEEP WRITING TO SOOTHE MY ANXIETIES.
I WRITE MY LETTERS UNDER THE MOONLIGHT ON THE SEASHORE. THEN I PUT THEM IN A BOTTLE AND TOSS THEM OUT TO SEA HOPING THEY WILL REACH HIM..

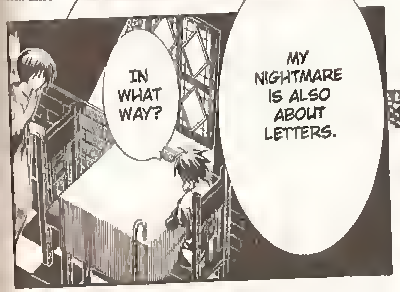

YES, YOU'RE PROBABLY RIGHT...
Though I've heard it can happen.
YOU CAN'T REALLY EXPECT A REPLY FROM A MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE...

OH...
I'VE NEVER RECEIVED A REPLY, YET I KEEP WRITING.


MOST PEOPLE DON'T WRITE LETTERS BEFORE THEY COME HERE.
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, SAI IRIMAJIRI


EXCUSE ME.
DING
I SENT A LETTER A FEW DAYS AGO...

OH... WRITING LETTERS IS JUST WHAT I DO.


IN WHAT WAY?
MY NIGHTMARE IS ALSO ABOUT LETTERS.

SLEEP NOW. LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND
WELL... I'LL TAKE A LOOK.
CLACK
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE LETTERS

THAT IS ENOUGH FOR ME.
I CAN WRITE ALL MY THOUGHTS OUT.
...BUT EVEN IF HE NEVER GETS THEM, I CAN TALK TO HIM THROUGH LETTERS.
NOT SINCE THOSE THINGS STARTED COMING INSTEAD OF A REPLY...
I CAN'T WRITE ANYMORE.
WELL, NOW..
BUT SURELY YOU KEPT WRITING BECAUSE YOU HOPED FOR A REPLY...
...SO I CAN GO BACK TO WRITING THE LETTERS IN MY DREAMS AGAIN.
THAT'S WHY I WANT YOU TO LOOK, HIRUKO...
I-I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE. I'M TOO SCARED TO LOOK AT THEM.
THOSE THINGS?

THEY'RE NATSUO'S EYES!
DEEP SHINY BLACK— LIKE OBSIDIANS, THE GLASS FORMED BY LAVA
THAT EYE COLOR!
EYEBALL
SAI, COULD THIS BE...
POP
HE PROMISED HE WOULD COME BACK TO ME.
NATSUO NAKARAI... MY LOVE...
NO ONE CAN EVER REPLACE NATSUO.
SO I GO ON WAITING, BELIEVING IN HIS PROMISE.
BUT I COULDN'T ACCEPT THAT!
THEY TOLD ME THAT HE DIED IN BATTLE
THEY KEPT WASHING ASHORE ONE BY ONE, BUT NOW IT'S STOPPED.
ONE
POP
SEE... WHAT ON EARTH IS INSIDE?
IF THESE BOTTLES ARE THE SAME AS THE ONES YOU SENT, WE CAN ASSUME THAT THE SAME NUMBER OF THEM HAVE NOW RETURNED.
...

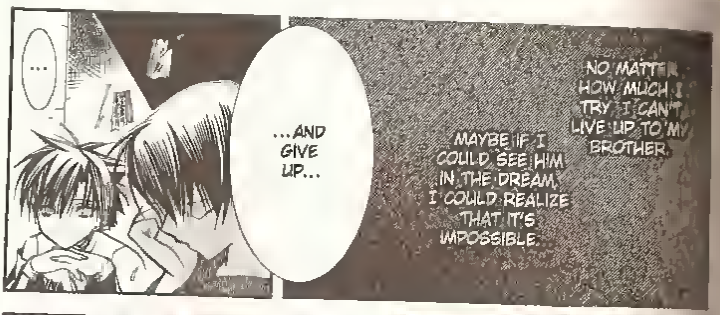
IS THIS ...?
SOON IT'LL BE COMPLETE.
EACH BOTTLE HAS A BODY PART IN IT.
NO...
IS HE COMPLETE?!
IT'S ALL PIECED TOGETHER NOW.
!
SWP
THERE'S ONE TOO MANY PARTS... LOOK.

THERE ARE THREE EYEBALLS...
IS IT FAMIL-IAR?
IT WAS IN A DIFFERENT BOTTLE FROM THE OTHER TWO.
ONE OF THEM IS CLOUDED.
THAT'S STRANGE.
THE EYES THAT I LOVE SHINE LIKE OBSIDIANS.
SWP
THIS EYEBALL HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH NATSUO!
NO!
IT ISN'T NATSUO'S!

TIME TO WAKE UP NOW.

NATSUO?! BUT YOU DIED IN BATTLE!
NA NATSUO
TELL ME... WHO ARE YOU?
CLINK
COME, SAI. I'VE COME TO TAKE YOU HOME...
SHE'S IGNORING HIM.
...
YOU... NAT-SUO IS DEAD...
??
I AM NATSUO'S TWIN BROTHER, FUYUO NAKARAI.
I SEE... I GUESS SHE DIDN'T MENTION ME...
!
It was so-so.
I'M HAPPY FOR YOU, SAI.
I GUESS THE ANXIOUS FEELINGS IN YOUR LETTERS SOMEHOW TURNED INTO HIS BODY...
...TO REUNITE YOU WITH A LOVED ONE WHO IS NO LONGER ALIVE.
EXCUSE ME...
DIES

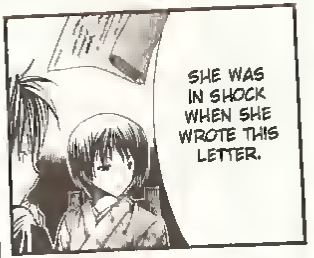
I WANTED TO BE THERE FOR HER IN HIS STEAD.
I EVEN GOUGED OUT MY BAD EYE—THE ONE THING THAT WAS DIFFERENT ABOUT US—IN ORDER TO LOOK LIKE HIM.
CATARACT
SAI LOVED MY BROTHER'S BLACK EYES..
BUT SHE SHRIEKED, AND EVER SINCE HAS SHIED AWAY FROM ME...
SAI CHOSE HIM OVER ME.
...I WAS SICKLY AND INTROVERTED. I LOOKED UP TO HIM SO MUCH.
WHILE HE WAS BRAVE AND SPIRITED ...
WE MAY HAVE BEEN TWINS BUT WE WERE THE EXACT OPPOSITES...
IN HER PAIN, SHE LASHED OUT AT ME!
SAI WAS DEVASTATED AND COULDN'T ACCEPT HIS DEATH
AND THEN HE DIED.
MY AFFECTION FOR HER RIVALED THAT OF MY BROTHER'S.
"I WISH IT HAD BEEN YOU INSTEAD."

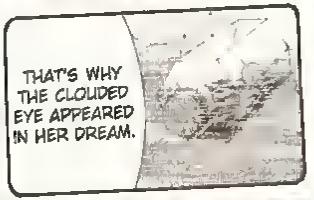

...
...AND GIVE UP...
MAYBE IF I COULD SEE HIM IN THE DREAM, I COULD REALIZE THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I TRY I CAN'T LIVE UP TO MY BROTHER.

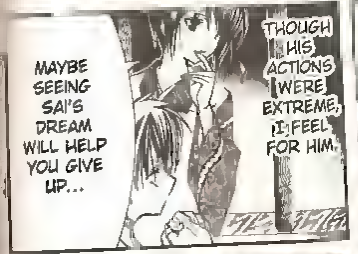
OH... I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE NATSUO AGAIN.
FINE WITH ME, BUT YOU NEED THE DREAMER'S PERMISSION

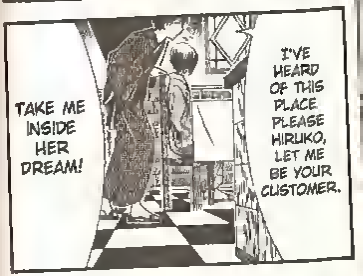
SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

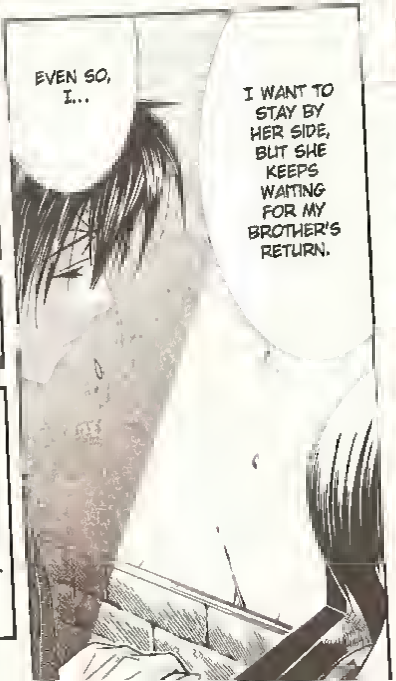
SAI ONLY HAS EYES FOR THE REVIVED NATSUO.
BUT SHE IGNORED IT THERE TOO.


SHE WAS IN SHOCK WHEN SHE WROTE THIS LETTER.


THAT'S WHY THE CLOUDED EYE APPEARED IN HER DREAM.


MAYBE SEEING SAI'S DREAM WILL HELP YOU GIVE UP...
THOUGH HIS ACTIONS WERE EXTREME, I FEEL FOR HIM.


TAKE ME INSIDE HER DREAM!
I'VE HEARD OF THIS PLACE PLEASE HIRUKO, LET ME BE YOUR CUSTOMER.


EVEN SO, I...
I WANT TO STAY BY HER SIDE, BUT SHE KEEPS WAITING FOR MY BROTHER'S RETURN.

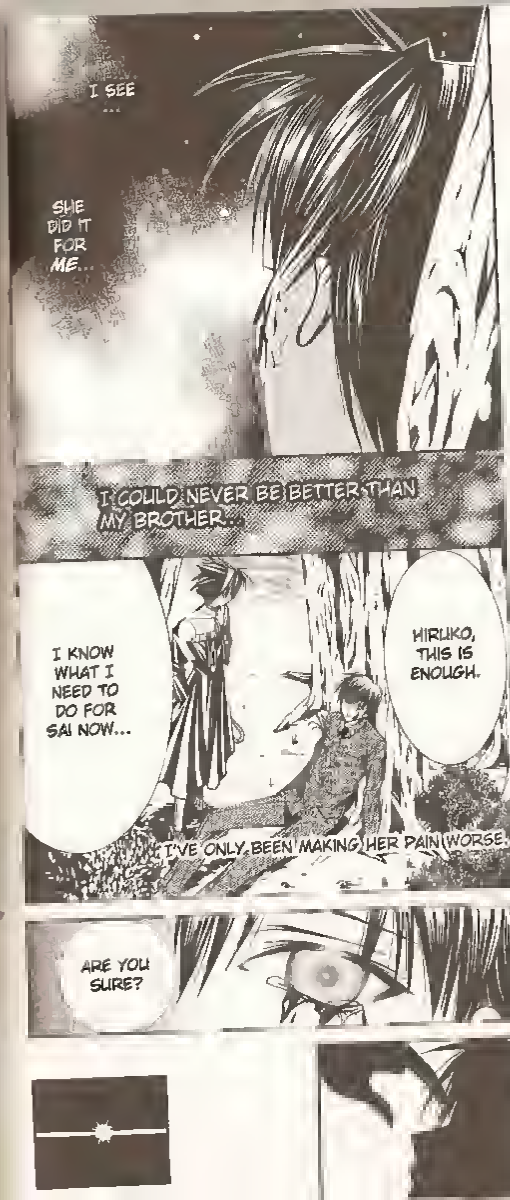
WHY COULDN'T I BE AS GOOD AS YOU?
I ENVIED YOU(SAI'S) UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
NATSUO, MY BROTHER ...
THAT'S IT!
MAYBE I WOULD KNOW WHAT I LACK IF I COULD SEE THROUGH HIS EYES...
?!
MAYBE I CAN BECOME MY BROTHER!
HIRUKO, I WANT YOU TO CHANGE MY BROTHER'S EYE FOR MINE.
SHF
!

AH YES, THAT'S RIGHT.
I CAN'T SEE PROPERLY BECAUSE OF MY BAD EYE.
THEY'RE EMBRACING AND TALKING. THEY'RE NOT EVEN LOOKING THIS WAY.

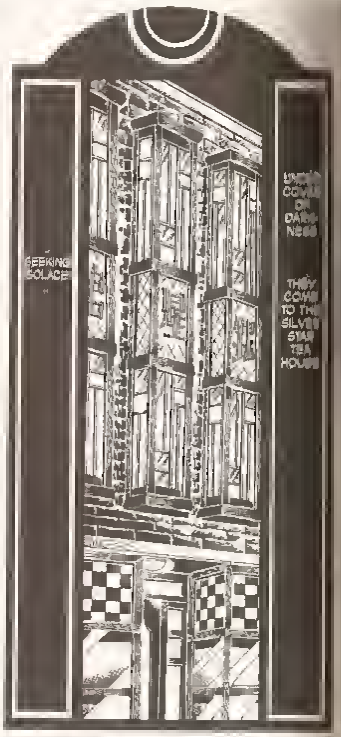
THERE WAS NO WAY...
...THAT I COULD COMPETE.
THIS BODY REMEMBERS THAT...
THAT'S RIGHT, THEY WERE JUST TALKING TO EACH OTHER...
...SAI'S VOICE?
NATSUO...
THAT'S WHY I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO ACCEPT YOUR DEATH.
HE WANTS TO BE YOU SO BADLY THAT HE GOUGED OUT HIS EYE.
NATSUO... I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ANYMORE. SO I KEEP IGNORING FUYUO.
YES... EVERY-THING.
HE'S DONE EVERYTHING TO BE MORE LIKE YOU.

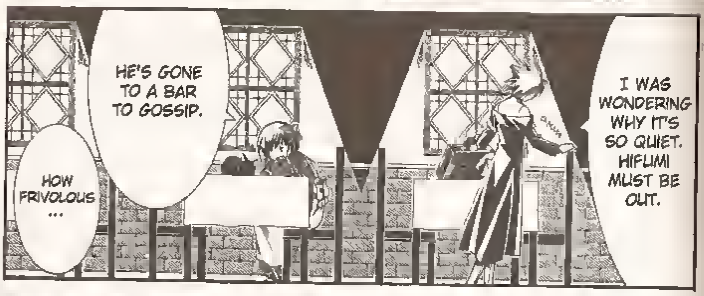
Uhm...
Ah...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! STOP THAT, HIRUKO!
SWIP
I'M SORRY, BUT I HAVE TO RESPECT THE WISHES OF MY CUSTOMER, FUYUO.
AH...! FUYUO, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!
THERE WAS NO WAY.
I DON'T WANT HIM TO BE REPLACED.
NATSUO WAS NATSUO!
YOU COULD NEVER REPLACE NATSUO!

LET'S SEE..
I WONDER HOW SHE AND NATSUO ARE GETTING ALONG IN HER DREAM.
FWIP
RIP
THE GIRL WHO CAME A FEW DAYS AGO? THE LETTER WRITER?
A LETTER CAME FROM SAI.
THEN...
AGAIN?!
?
NO.. THEY WON'T BE COMING TO THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE AGAIN.
AND WHEN I DID, THE BOTTLES RETURNED AGAIN.
I'VE BEEN SO HAPPY WITH NATSUO, AND I'M ABLE TO WRITE LETTERS AGAIN.
...BUT THERE WAS ONE PART MISSING.
I PUT THE PARTS TOGETHER, SAME AS WHAT WE DID WITH NATSUO...

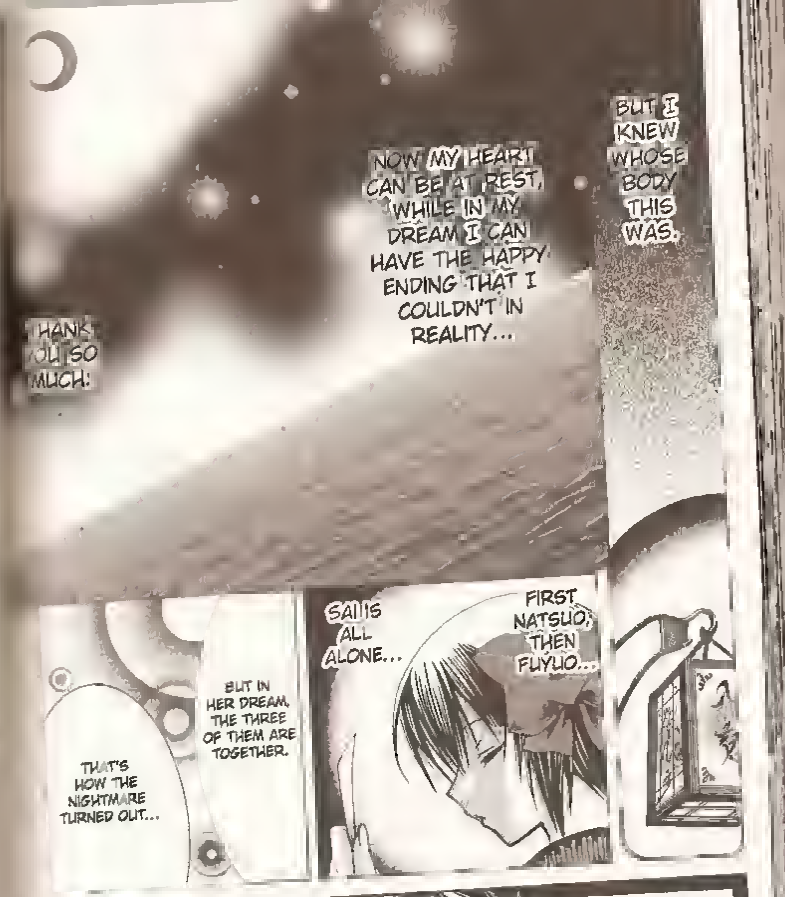

I SEE...
SHE DID IT FOR ME...
I COULD NEVER BE BETTER THAN MY BROTHER...
I KNOW WHAT I NEED TO DO FOR SAI NOW...
HIRUKO, THIS IS ENOUGH.
I'VE ONLY BEEN MAKING HER PAIN WORSE.
ARE YOU SURE?
DEATH...
IF I ACCEPT YOUR DEATH, THEN...

The Twenty-Fifth Night: Clockwork

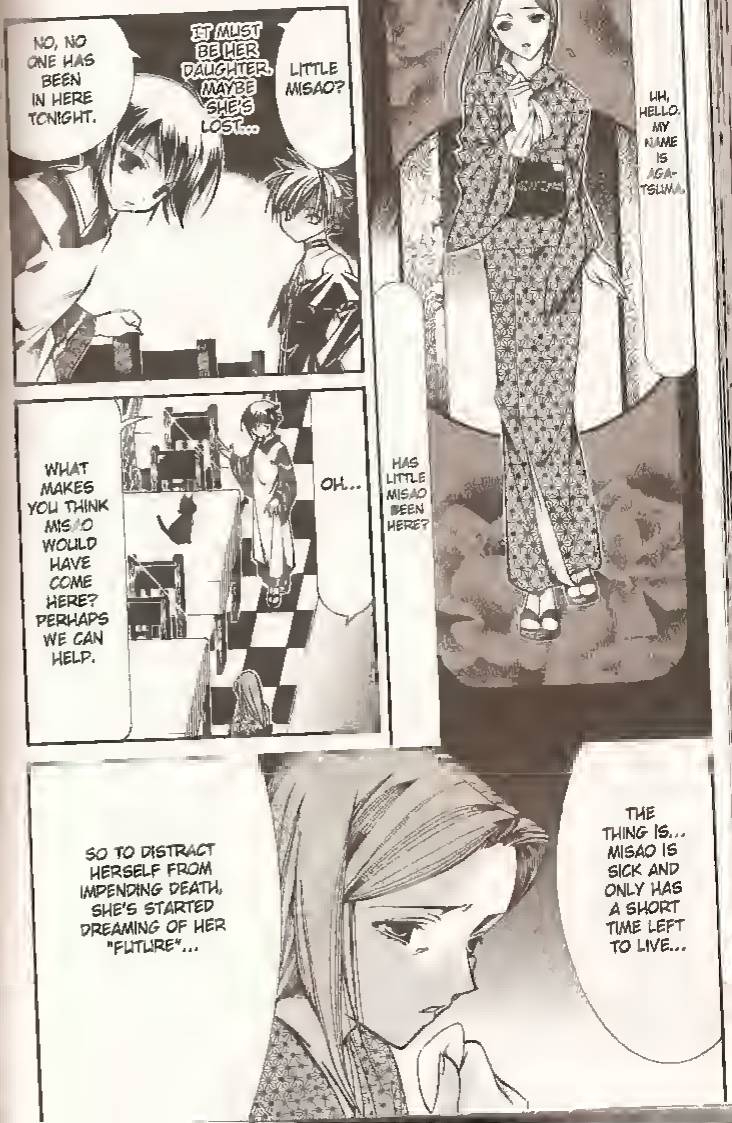


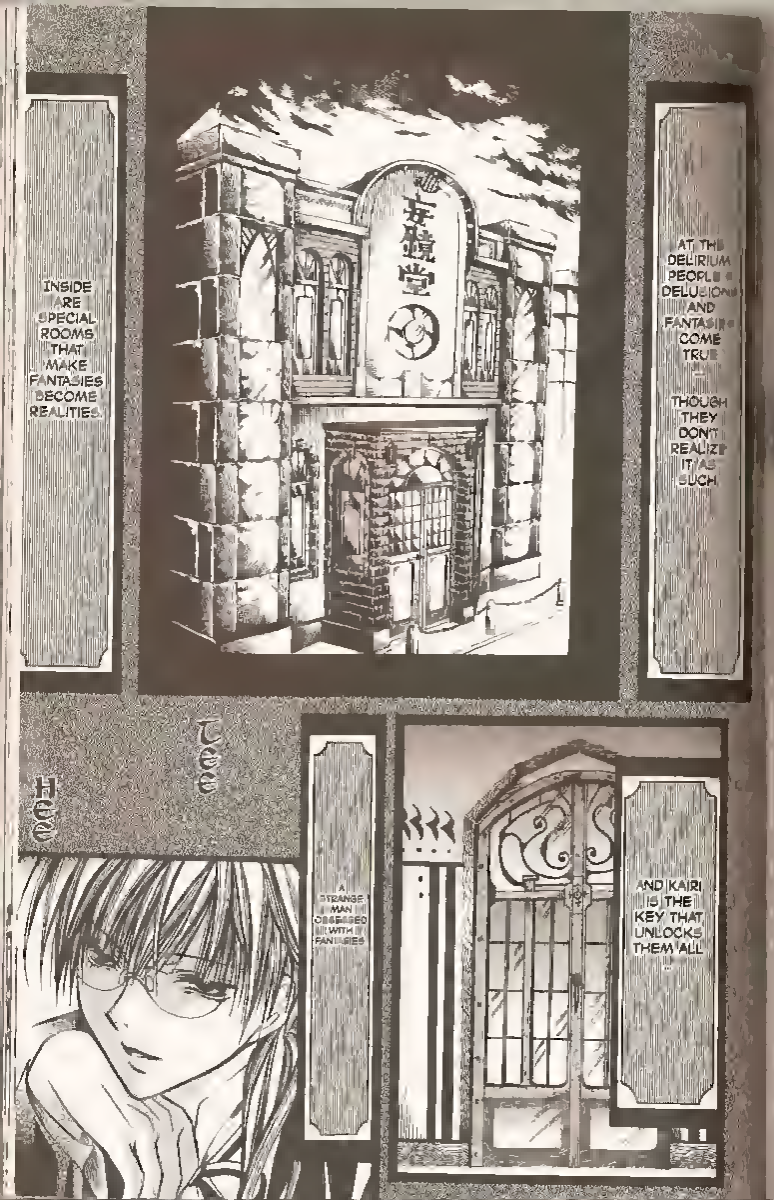


DING

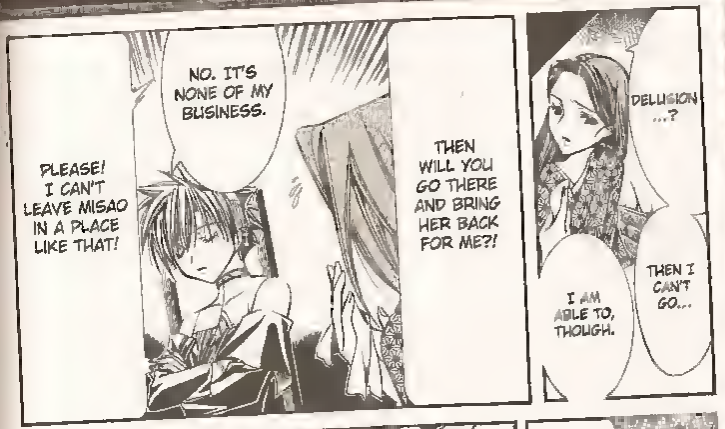

THANK YOU SO MUCH.
NOW MY HEART CAN BE AT REST, WHILE IN MY DREAM I CAN HAVE THE HAPPY ENDING THAT I COULDN'T IN REALITY...
BUT I KNEW WHOSE BODY THIS WAS.
THAT'S HOW THE NIGHTMARE TURNED OUT...
BUT IN HER DREAM, THE THREE OF THEM ARE TOGETHER.
SAI IS ALL ALONE...
FIRST NATSUO, THEN FUYUO...

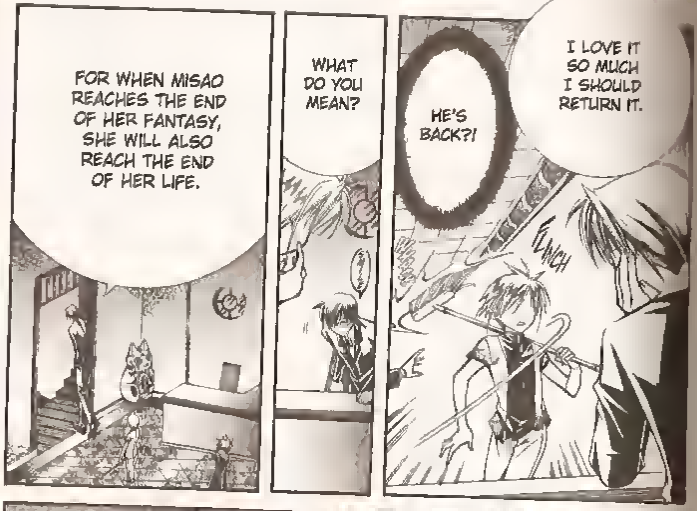
IN HER DREAM, THE JUNIKAI TOWER IN ASAKUSA IS STILL STANDING. SO, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, SHE WAKES AND GOES TO WHERE IT ONCE STOOD.
AND IT'S GOTTEN SO SHE CAN'T DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE DREAM AND REALITY.
I DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS, BUT IN HER DREAM, TIME PASSES QUICKLY. SHE AGES AS SHE LIVES OUT ALL THE MILESTONES OF HER LIFE.
BUT IF SHE'S NOT HERE, WHERE IS SHE ...?
THAT'S WHY I THOUGHT SHE MIGHT COME HERE, TO SEEK HELP FOR THIS DREAM
BUT THE REAL TOWER COLLAPSED IN THE GREAT EARTHQUAKE.
SO MISAO BELIEVES THAT THE TOWER IN HER DREAMS IS REAL...


NO, NO ONE HAS BEEN IN HERE TONIGHT.
IT MUST BE HER DAUGHTER. MAYBE SHE'S LOST...
LITTLE MISAO?
UH, HELLO. MY NAME IS AGATSUMA.
HAS LITTLE MISAO BEEN HERE?
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK MISAO WOULD HAVE COME HERE? PERHAPS WE CAN HELP.
OH...
THE THING IS... MISAO IS SICK AND ONLY HAS A SHORT TIME LEFT TO LIVE...
SO TO DISTRACT HERSELF FROM IMPENDING DEATH, SHE'S STARTED DREAMING OF HER "FUTURE"...

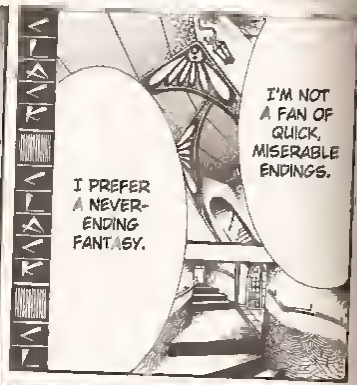

INSIDE ARE SPECIAL ROOMS THAT MAKE FANTASIES BECOME REALITIES.
女鏡堂
AT THE DELIRIUM PEOPLE'S DELUSIONS AND FANTASIES COME TRUE... THOUGH THEY DON'T REALIZE IT AS SUCH.
HOW?
THE
A STRANGE MAN OBSESSED WITH FANTASIES
AND KAIRI IS THE KEY THAT UNLOCKS THEM ALL...

THE DELIRIUM—A PLACE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE TORMENTED BY THEIR DELUSIONS.


PLEASE! I CAN'T LEAVE MISAO IN A PLACE LIKE THAT!
NO. IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS.
THEN WILL YOU GO THERE AND BRING HER BACK FOR ME?!
DELUSION ...?
I AM ABLE TO, THOUGH.
THEN I CAN'T GO...


FOR WHEN MISAO REACHES THE END OF HER FANTASY, SHE WILL ALSO REACH THE END OF HER LIFE.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
HE'S BACK?!
I LOVE IT SO MUCH I SHOULD RETURN IT.
CLANG

WELL, NIGHTMARES ARE THE SAME, AREN'T THEY?
HA HA


I'M NOT A FAN OF QUICK, MISERABLE ENDINGS.
I PREFER A NEVER-ENDING FANTASY.

I DON'T GET THE APPEAL.
NEVER-ENDING ...

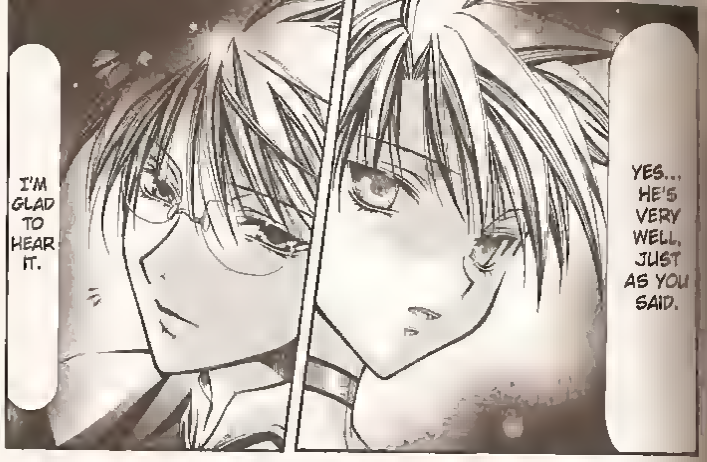
LONG TIME NO SEE!
OH! HIRUKO?
CLANG

SLAM
TIME PASSES

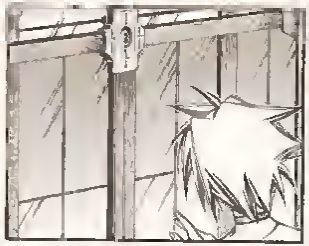
HA HA HA——!
HA HA... HE'LL SNAP OUT OF IT SOON.
IS KAIRI LOST IN ANOTHER FANTASY?
HAHAHA——

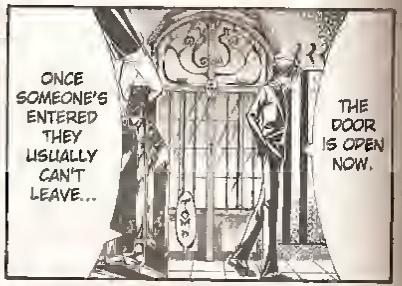
IGN DEMON ISLAND
... BUT I DOUBT KAIRI WILL GIVE UP A FANTASY LIKE HERS SO EASILY.
Umm...
MISAO'S IN ONE OF OUR ROOMS RIGHT NOW

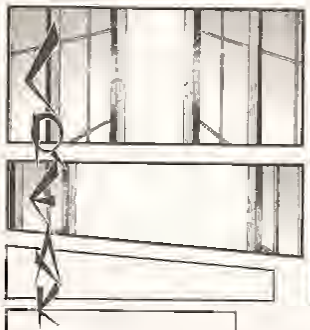
WHAT?! HER MOTHER?!
BY THE WAY, DO YOU HAVE A VISITOR HERE CALLED MISAO? HER MOTHER ASKED ME TO BRING HER BACK.

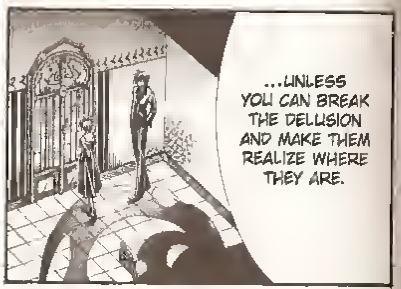

I'M GLAD TO HEAR IT.
YES... HE'S VERY WELL, JUST AS YOU SAID.

CLICK




ONCE SOMEONE'S ENTERED THEY USUALLY CAN'T LEAVE...
THE DOOR IS OPEN NOW.




...UNLESS YOU CAN BREAK THE DELUSION AND MAKE THEM REALIZE WHERE THEY ARE.

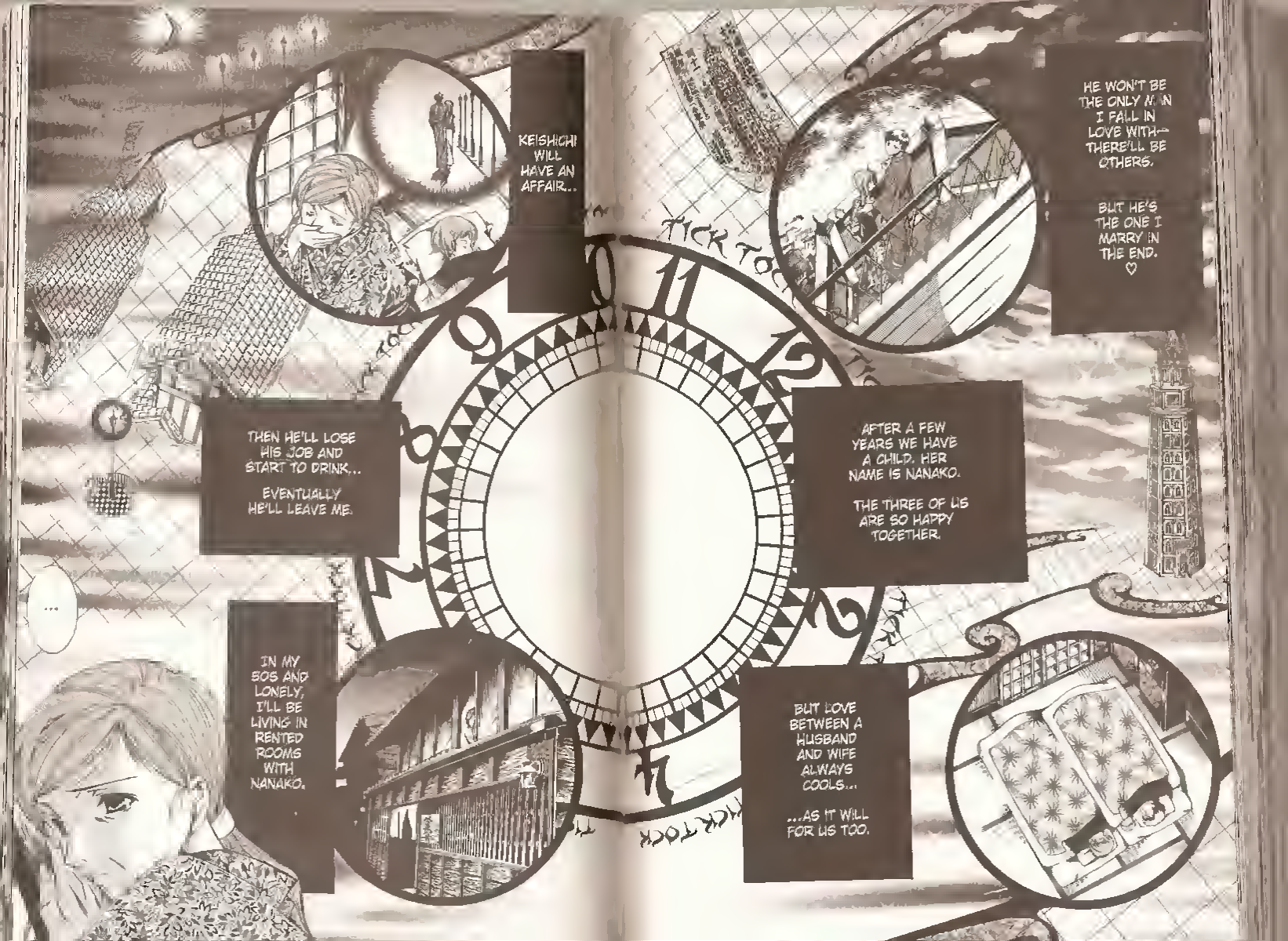
"HIRUKO" WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD.

YOU'VE SEEN HIM?
YOU MEAN AZUSA?

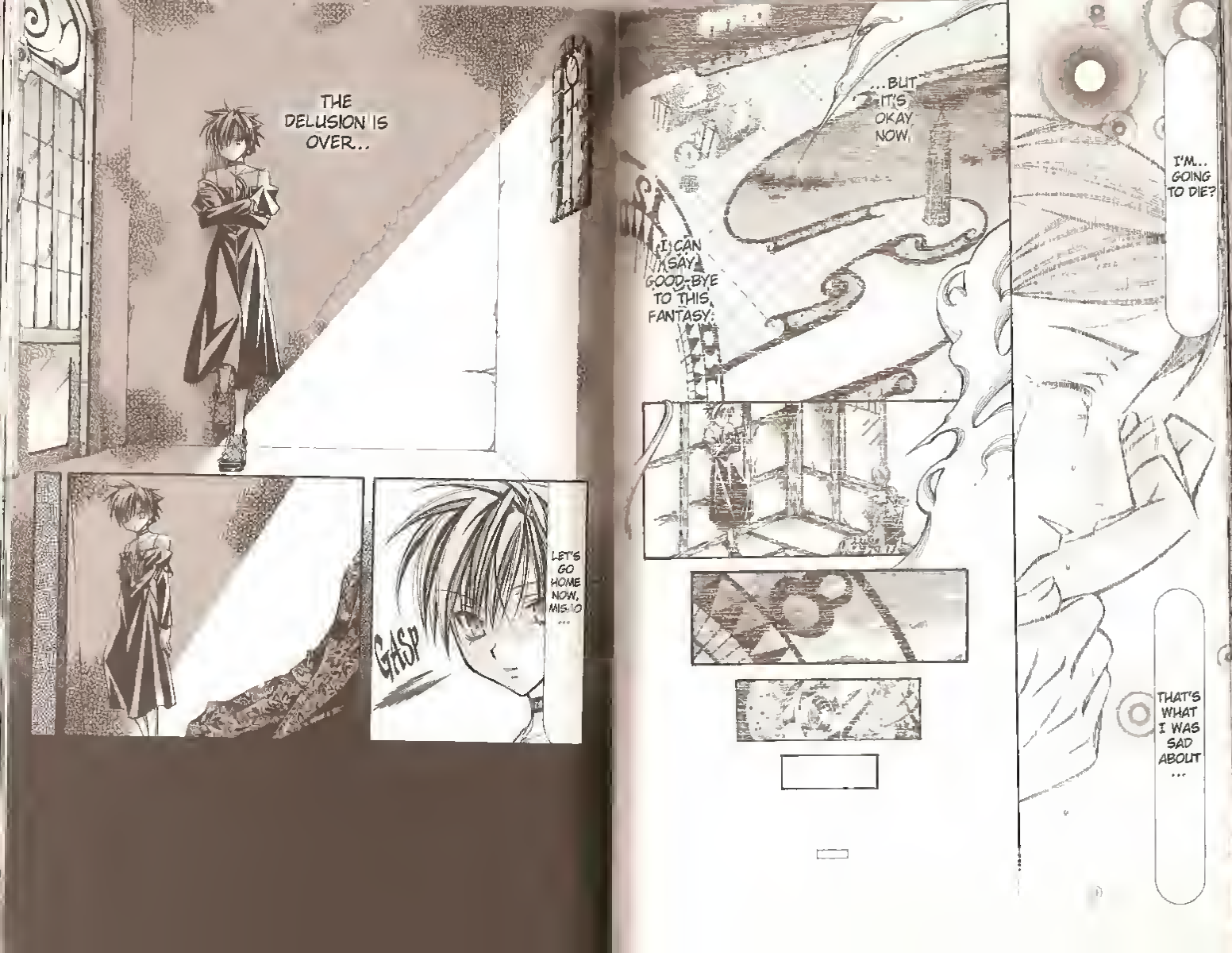
TICK TOCK
TICK TOCK
TICK
12
1
2
CLICK TOCK
THE JUNKAI IS GROWING AS THE CLOCK TICKS...
FWOOM
TICK TOCK
NIGHT ALREADY? THAT'S QUICK
THE SPEED OF THE TURNING CLOCK FACE SHOWS THE PASSAGE OF TIME.
TICK TOCK
CLICK
CLICK
MISAO? I'M A BAKU CALLED HIRUKO. I'VE COME TO GET YOU.

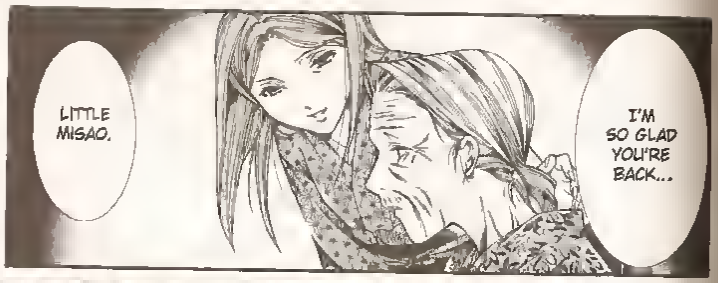
TICKTOCKTICKTOCKTICKTOCKTICKTOCKTIC
CRANK
CRANK
IT'S GOING EVEN FASTER NOW
OH.
THIS CLOCK FACE IS TURNING TO THE LEFT.
NORMALLY A CLOCK WOULD...
CLICK CLICK
HEY, HIRUKO! LOOK!
?!
TICK TOCK
THAT'S RIGHT.
MADE IT?
TICK
TOCK
IN MY DREAM, I TURN THE WINDUP KEY AND BUILD MY OWN WORLD.
WHY?! I'VE MADE IT THIS BIG SO FAR!
BUT THIS IS ALL A FANTASY. THIS WORLD IS AN ILLUSION.
AND YOU WANT TO SPEND YOUR FUTURE HERE...
SO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT THIS WORLD EXISTS.

YES. I'VE DECIDED EVERYTHING THAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.
I WANT TO SEE THE FUTURE THAT AWAITS YOU IN THIS WORLD.
HUH?
THEN LET ME HELP.
OKAY!
!
CRANK
CRANK
CRANK
THE MAN I'LL MEET IN THE TOWER IS CALLED KEISHICHI.
I CONTROL TIME HERE. SO THE MORE I TURN THE KEY, THE MORE I...
IF I TURN THE KEY, I GROW UP TOO.
IN THIS PLACE SHE CAN HAVE THE LIFE SHE NEVER WOULD HAVE OTHERWISE...
THE TOWER'S GROWN REALLY TALL.
IT'S ALL PLANNED OUT?
YES. WHEN I GET OLDER, I CLIMB THE COMPLETED TOWER AND MEET THE MAN OF MY DREAMS.

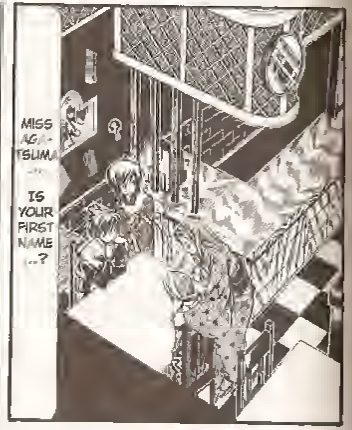

KEISHICHI WILL HAVE AN AFFAIR..
HE WON'T BE THE ONLY M- IN I FALL IN LOVE WITH— THERE'LL BE OTHERS.
BUT HE'S THE ONE I MARRY IN THE END. ♡
THEN HE'LL LOSE HIS JOB AND START TO DRINK...
EVENTUALLY HE'LL LEAVE ME.
AFTER A FEW YEARS WE HAVE A CHILD. HER NAME IS NANAKO.
THE THREE OF US ARE SO HAPPY TOGETHER.
...
IN MY SOS AND LONELY, I'LL BE LIVING IN RENTED ROOMS WITH NANAKO.
BUT LOVE BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND WIFE ALWAYS COOLS...
...AS IT WILL FOR US TOO.

EVERY-THING YOU'VE CREATED IN HERE WILL DISAPPEAR.
IF YOU WANT TO GO HOME, YOU HAVE TO GIVE UP THIS DELUSION.
EVEN THOUGH IN THE REAL WORLD YOU ONLY HAVE A SHORT TIME LEFT TO LIVE?
I TOLD YOU I WAS HERE TO TAKE YOU BACK.
YOU TURNED THE KEY... AND I SAW SO MANY THINGS...
THERE'S NOTHING HERE FOR ME...
GIVE UP THIS DELU-SION
THE REAL ME...
YOU MADE ME REMEMBER IMPORTANT THINGS THAT I'D FORGOTTEN...
NGH
THIS... IS MY FUTURE?
BUT YOU DON'T LOOK HAPPY
NGH..
WHAT?
IT WAS VERY WELL PLANNED.
I WAS YOUNG AND CUTE WHEN I CAME INTO THIS ROOM...
MY JOINTS ACHE...
MY FACE IS WRINKLED...
AH.
I WANT TO GO BACK TO WHO I WAS!
WAAAH!
I DON'T WANT TO GET OLD!
AAAH
I DON'T WANT THIS FUTURE.


THE DELUSION IS OVER..
GASP
LET'S GO HOME NOW, MISAO ...
I CAN SAY GOOD-BYE TO THIS FANTASY.
...BUT IT'S OKAY NOW.
I'M... GOING TO DIE?
THAT'S WHAT I WAS SAD ABOUT ...


LITTLE MISAO.
I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE BACK...

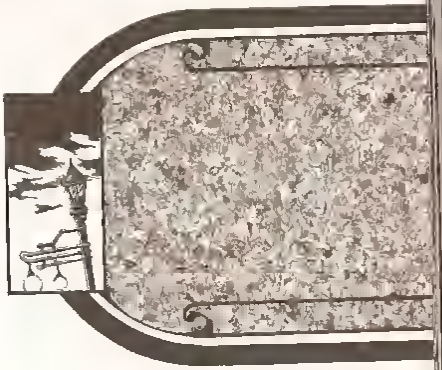
I'M NANAKO.


MISS AGATSUMA...
IS YOUR FIRST NAME...?

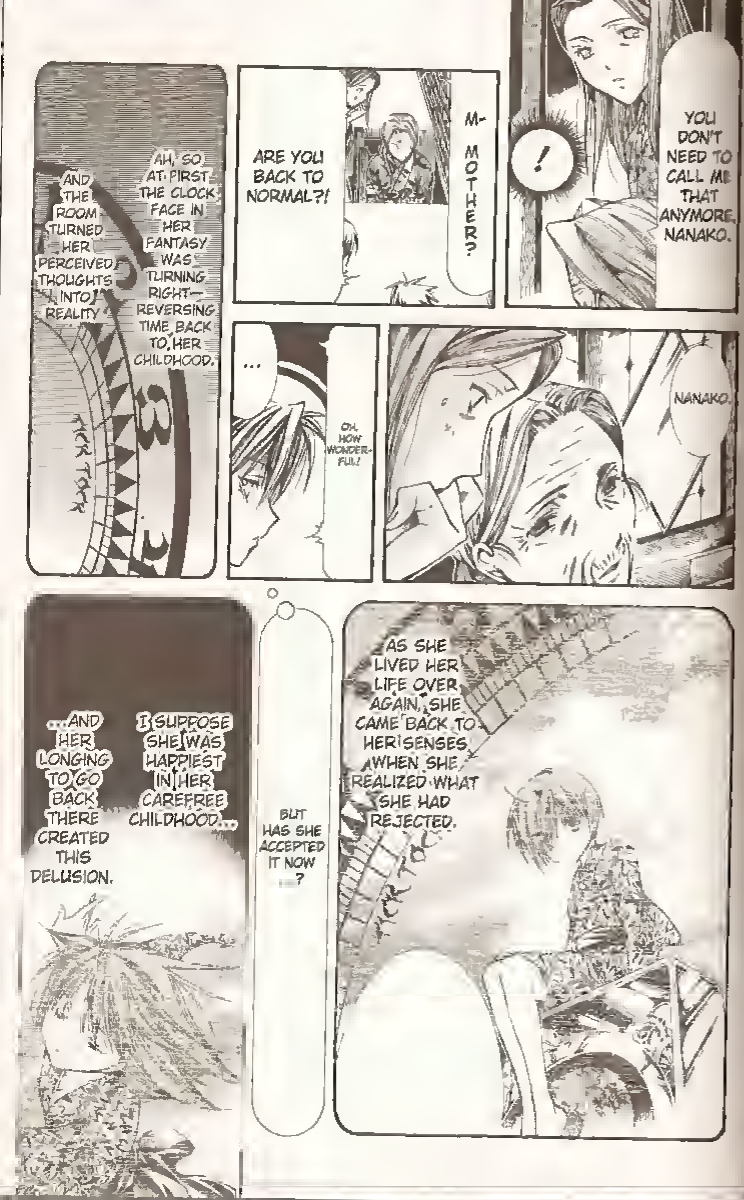
MISAO WASN'T MISS AGATSUMA'S DAUGHTER, SHE WAS HER MOTHER.
SO YOUR FATHER'S NAME...

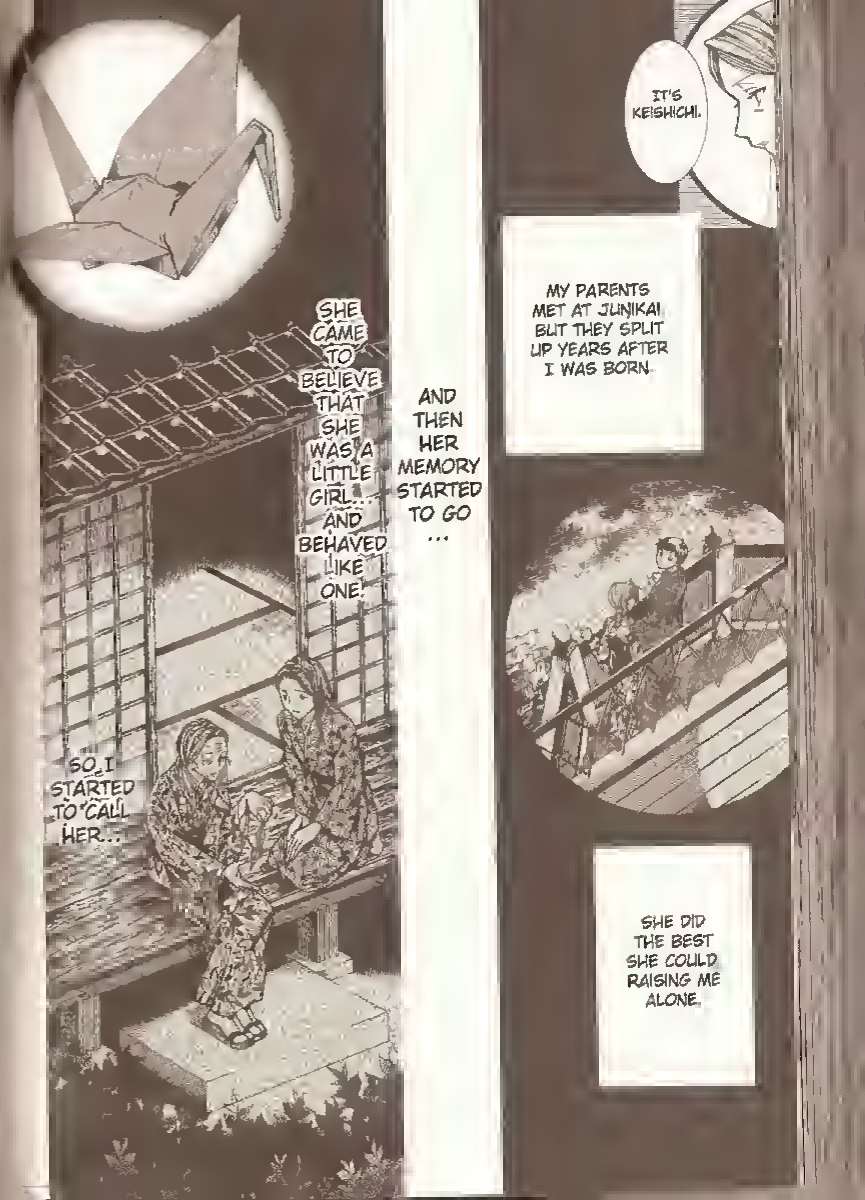
THEN...
AH.

WHAT HAPPENED?!

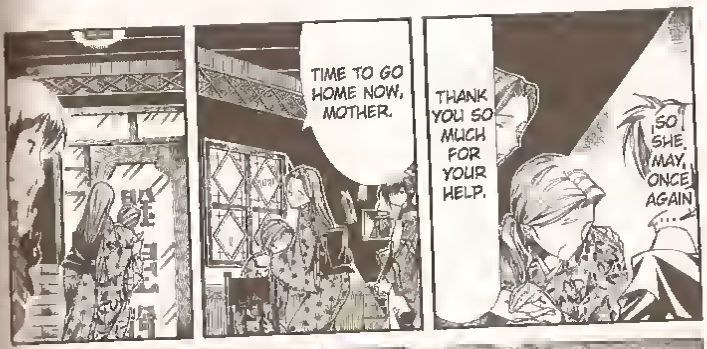


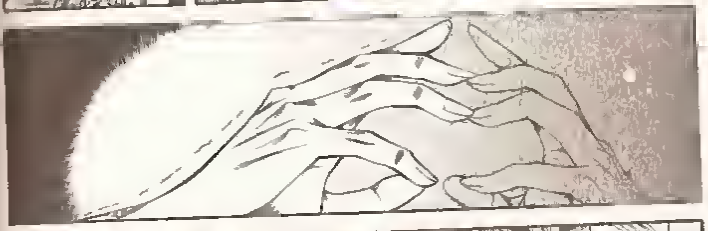
THIS ISN'T LITTLE MISAO!
SHOULDN'T SHE GO BACK TO HER ORIGINAL, YOUTHFUL FORM WHEN THE DELUSION WAS OVER?

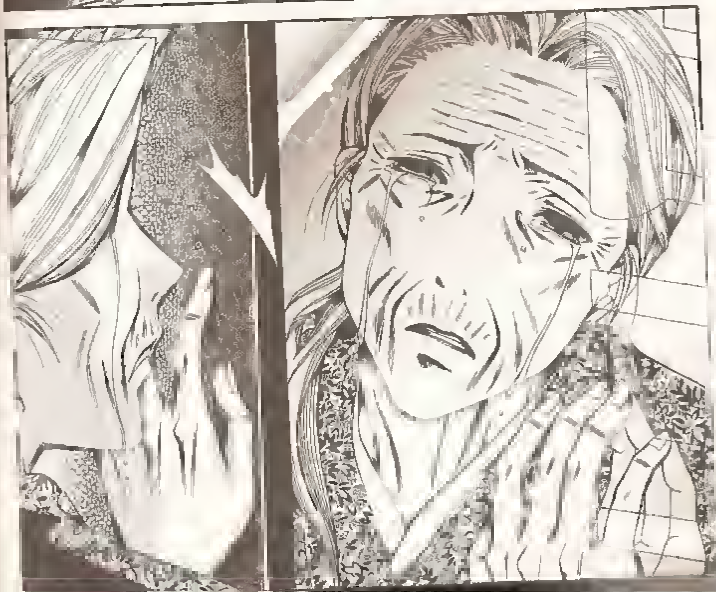

AH, SO AT FIRST THE CLOCK FACE IN HER FANTASY WAS TURNING RIGHT— REVERSING TIME BACK TO HER CHILDHOOD.
AND THE ROOM TURNED HER PERCEIVED THOUGHTS INTO REALITY.
TICK TOCK
ARE YOU BACK TO NORMAL?!
M-MOTHER?
YOU DON'T NEED TO CALL ME THAT ANYMORE, NANAKO.
!
...
OH, HOW WONDERFUL!
NANAKO.
...AND HER LONGING TO GO BACK THERE CREATED THIS DELUSION.
I SUPPOSE SHE WAS HAPPIEST IN HER CAREFREE CHILDHOOD...
BUT HAS SHE ACCEPTED IT NOW ...?
AS SHE LIVED HER LIFE OVER AGAIN, SHE CAME BACK TO HER SENSES WHEN SHE REALIZED WHAT SHE HAD REJECTED.
TICK TOCK


SO I STARTED TO CALL HER...
SHE CAME TO BELIEVE THAT SHE WAS A LITTLE GIRL... AND BEHAVED LIKE ONE!
AND THEN HER MEMORY STARTED TO GO ...
IT'S KEISHICHI.
MY PARENTS MET AT JUNIKAI BUT THEY SPLIT UP YEARS AFTER I WAS BORN.
SHE DID THE BEST SHE COULD RAISING ME ALONE.

The Twenty-Sixth Night: Shadows

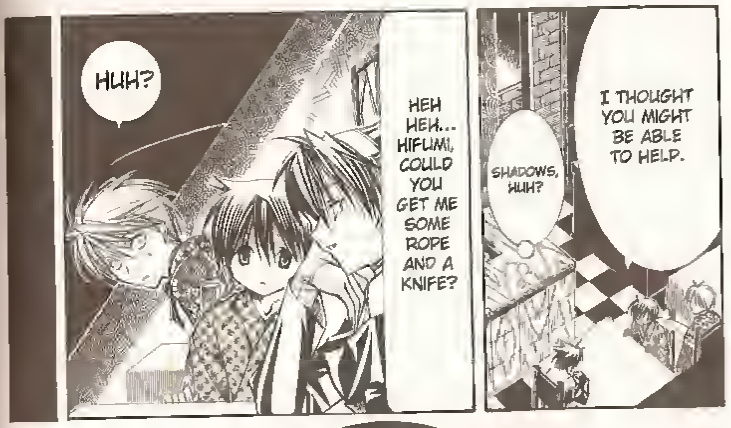


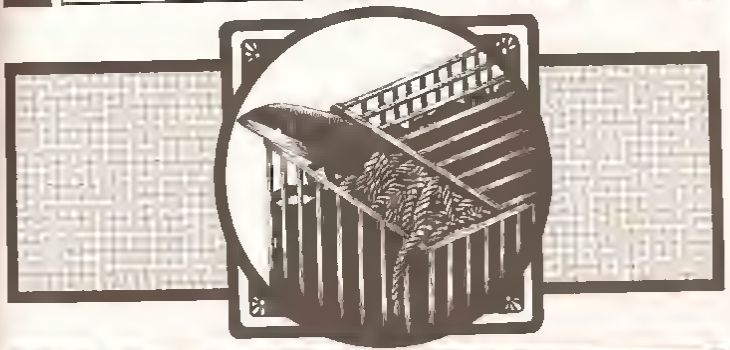


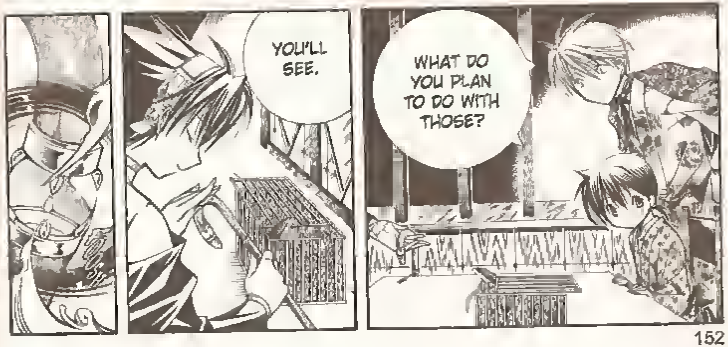


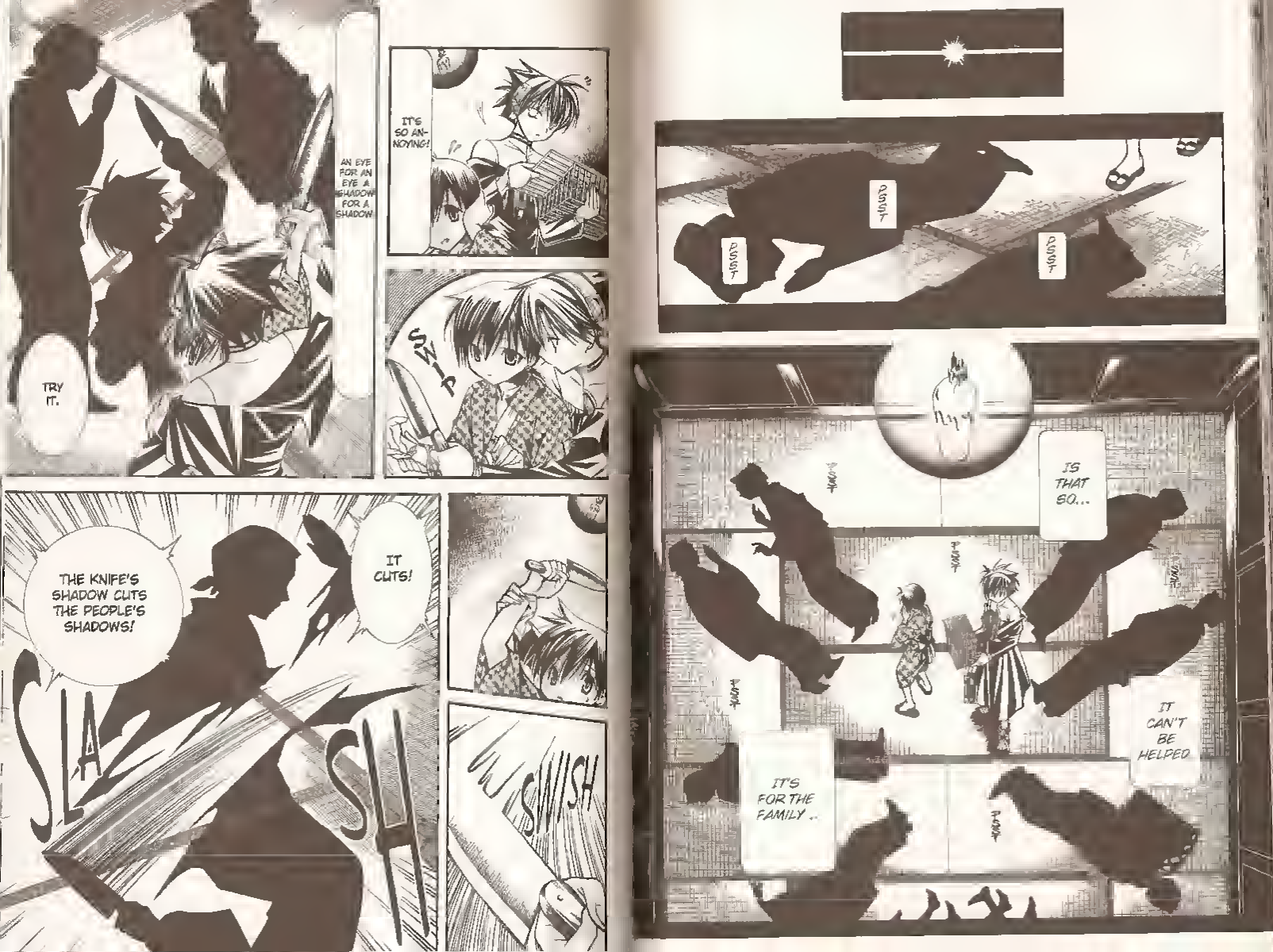
THAT'S FINE. WHAT'S YOUR NIGHTMARE?
I DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY THOUGH IS THAT OKAY?
I'VE BEEN DREAMING ABOUT SHADOWS.
I CAME TO ASK YOU ABOUT A NIGHTMARE.
UMM, I'M MEGURU KUCHIBA
BUT THEY'RE SHADOWS SO I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT...
SHADOWS OF PEOPLE. THEY'RE WHISPERING TO EACH OTHER, AND THE SOUND IS HURTING MY EARS.
HOW SAD...
FOR ME DREAMS ARE TO BE EATEN, NOT SEEN.
THERE ARE GOOD DREAMS TOO— THE KIND THAT PUT A SMILE ON YOUR FACE ALL DAY. SO YOU NEVER GET TO SEE THOSE?
THE ONLY DREAMS YOU KNOW ARE NIGHTMARES.
BUT YOU DON'T EVEN GET TO SEE THEM. WONDERFUL THINGS HAPPEN, YOUR GREATEST WISHES...
THOSE DREAMS ARE USELESS TO ME.
OH...?
I HAVE WISHES ...
SO YOU DON'T DREAM AT ALL, HIRUKO?
UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS
THEY COME TO THE SILVER STAR TEA HOUSE
SEEKING SOLACE
DING
Again with the nightmares.
...TO EAT DELICIOUS NIGHTMARES.

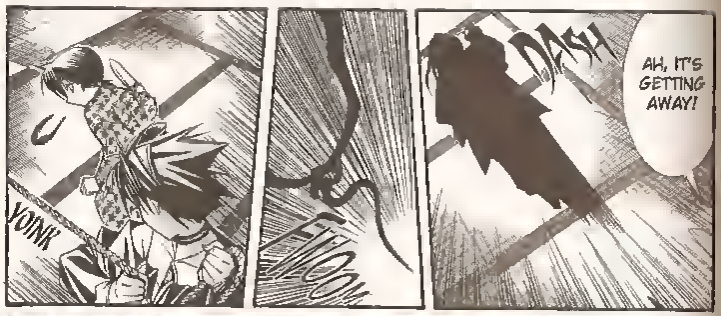
SLEEP NOW... LEAVE THIS WORLD BEHIND.

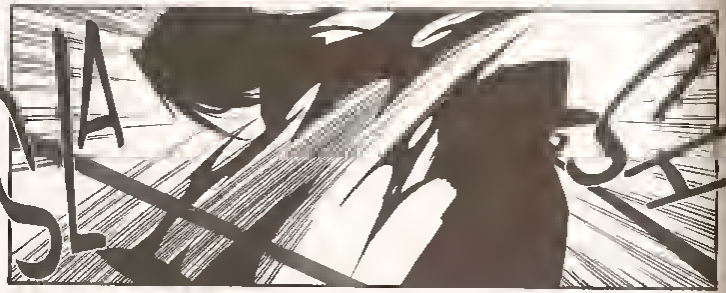

HUH?
HEH HEH... HIFUMI, COULD YOU GET ME SOME ROPE AND A KNIFE?
SHADOWS, HUH?
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP.




YOU'LL SEE.
WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO WITH THOSE?


TRY IT.
AN EYE FOR AN EYE A SHADOW FOR A SHADOW
IT'S SO AN-NOYING!
SWISH
THE KNIFE'S SHADOW CUTS THE PEOPLE'S SHADOWS!
IT CUTS!
SLA
SH
SWISH
IS THAT SO...
IT CAN'T BE HELPED
IT'S FOR THE FAMILY..


YOINK
DASH
AH, IT'S GETTING AWAY!


SLA
SH

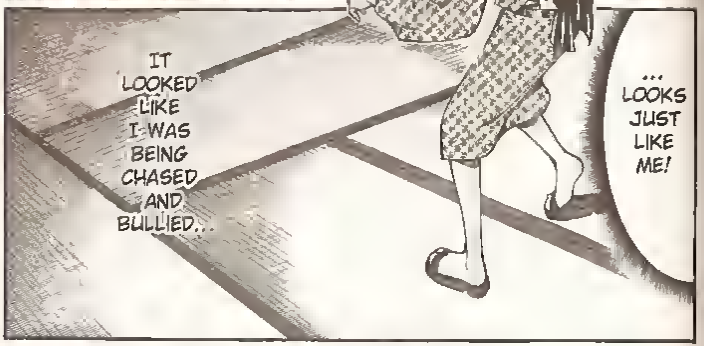
I FINALLY GOT RID OF THEM. THANK YOU, HIRUKO!

SHUT UP!
THERE MUST BE SOME OTHER...
BUT HE LOVES HIS PARENTS, SO HE'S SURE TO...
I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING YOU'RE SAYING!
HOPEFULLY THEY'LL LIKE HIM..
SLA
SH

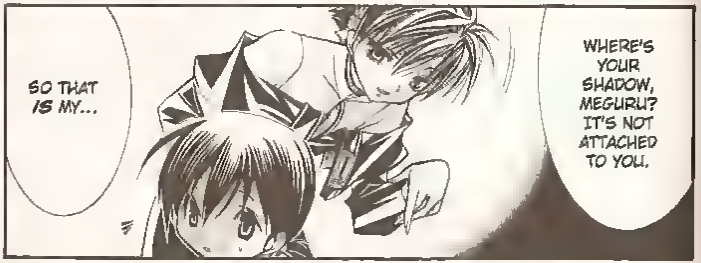
NOW I CAN GET RID OF THEM EASILY!
GREAT.

SWISH
YAR!
YAR!

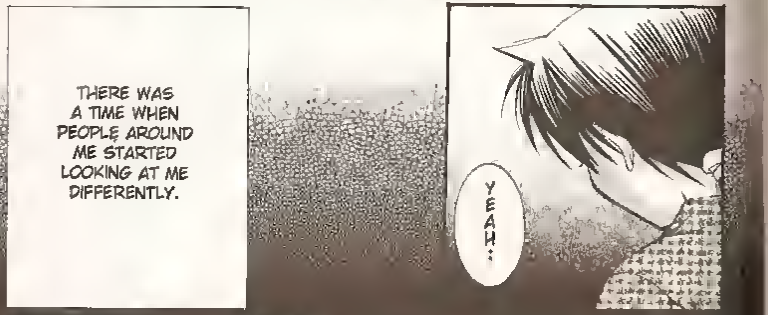
WAIT... I THINK I'VE HEARD THIS CONVERSATION BEFORE...

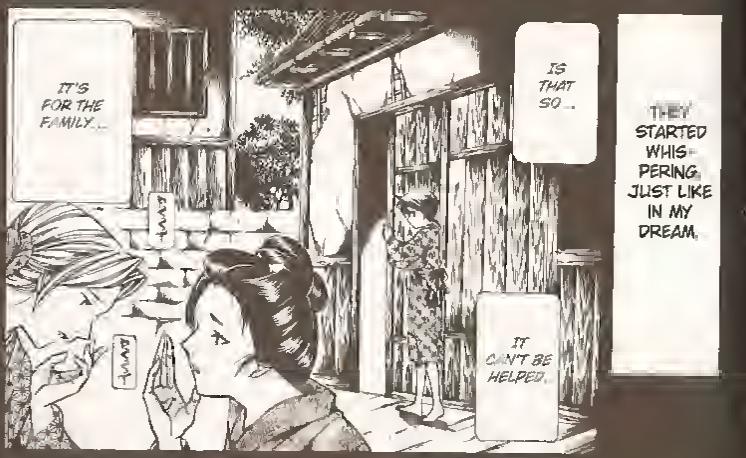


COULD IT BE THAT TIME WHEN...

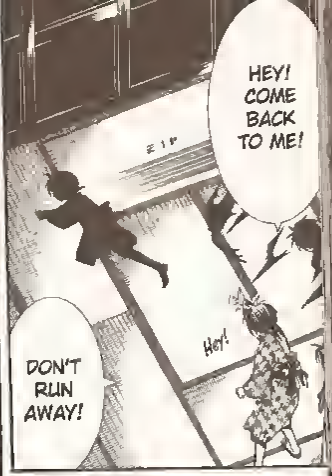


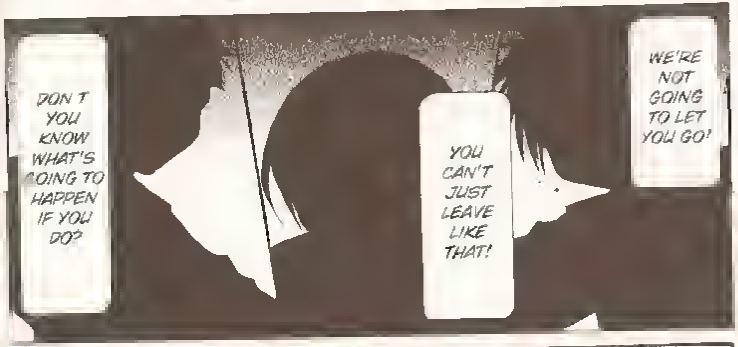
HIRUKO, I REMEMBER WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THIS DREAM.
IN REAL LIFE?


THERE WAS A TIME WHEN PEOPLE AROUND ME STARTED LOOKING AT ME DIFFERENTLY.
YEAH.

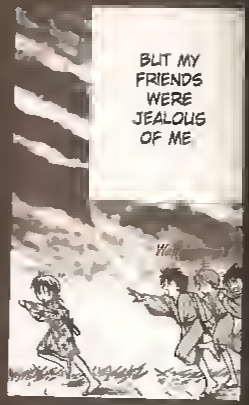

IT'S FOR THE FAMILY...
IS THAT SO...
THEY STARTED WHISPERING, JUST LIKE IN MY DREAM.
IT CAN'T BE HELPED.

HE'S SURROUNDED AGAIN...

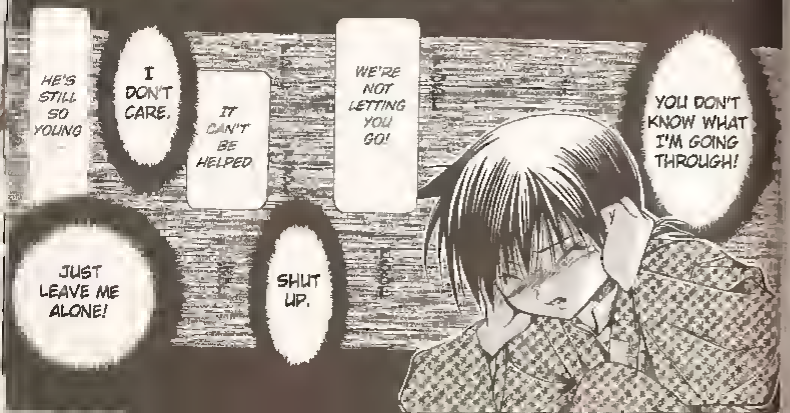

HEY! COME BACK TO ME!
DON'T RUN AWAY!
Hey!

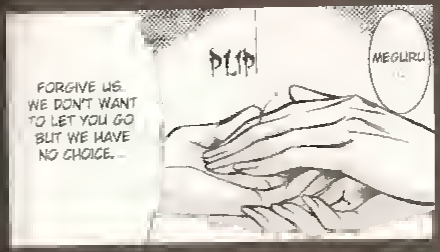

DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IF YOU DO?
YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE LIKE THAT!
WE'RE NOT GOING TO LET YOU GO!

I KNEW IT...
...

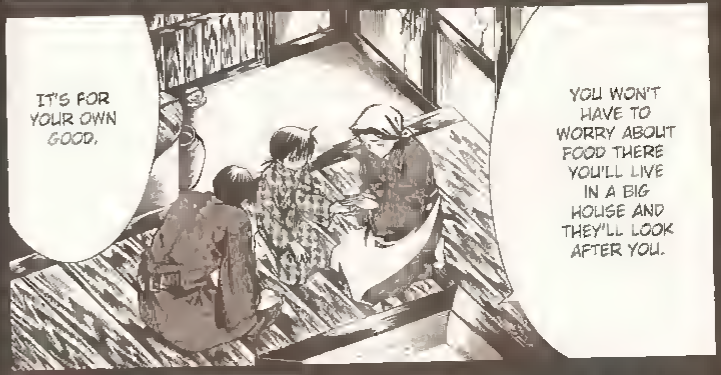

BUT MY FRIENDS WERE JEALOUS OF ME.

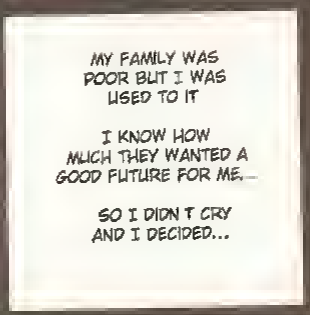
DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IF YOU DO?
YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE LIKE THAT!
WE'RE NOT GOING TO LET YOU GO!

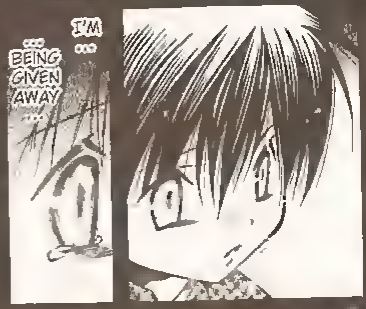

HE'S STILL SO YOUNG...
I DON'T CARE.
IT CAN'T BE HELPED
WE'RE NOT LETTING YOU GO!
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M GOING THROUGH!
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!
SHUT UP.


FORGIVE US. WE DON'T WANT TO LET YOU GO BUT WE HAVE NO CHOICE...
PLIP
MEGURU!

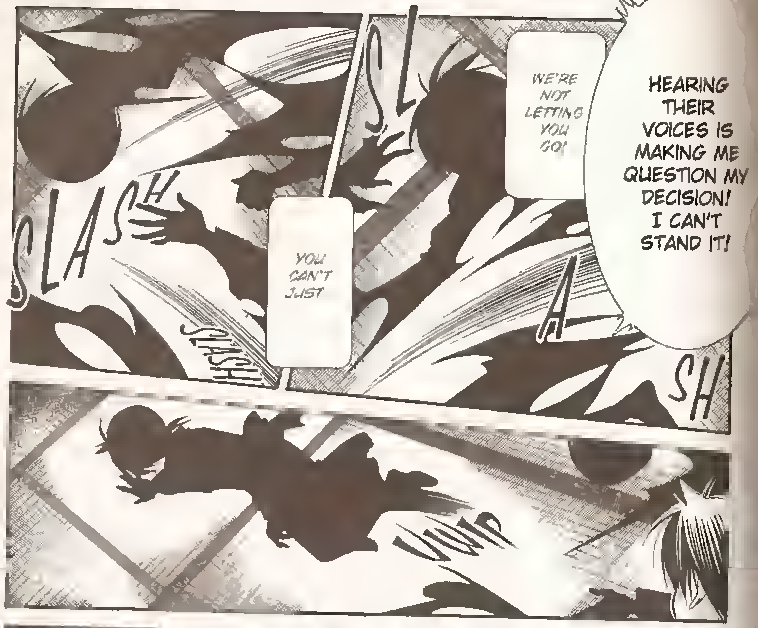
IT STARTED THE TIME MY PARENTS TOLD ME...

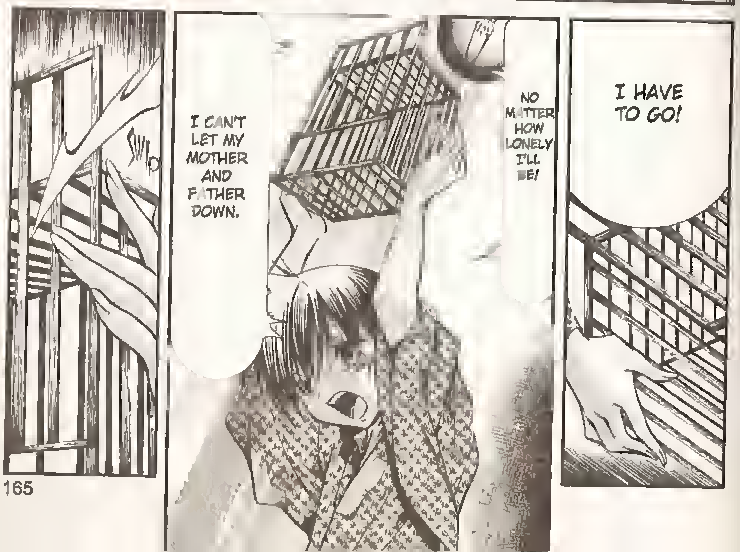

IT'S FOR YOUR OWN GOOD.
YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT FOOD THERE YOU'LL LIVE IN A BIG HOUSE AND THEY'LL LOOK AFTER YOU.

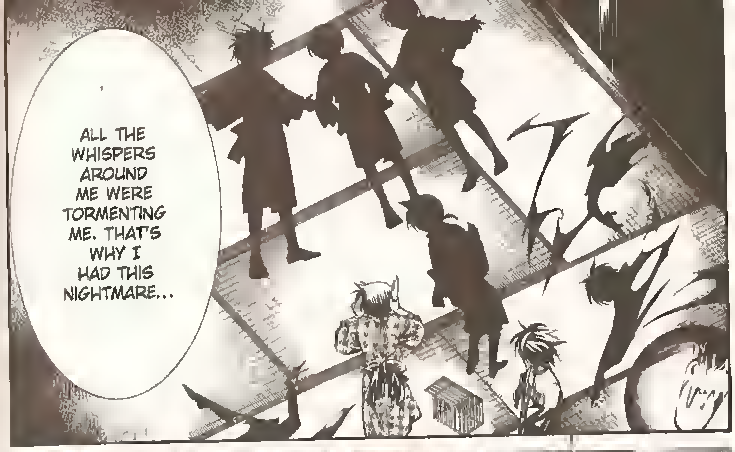

MY FAMILY WAS POOR BUT I WAS USED TO IT
I KNOW HOW MUCH THEY WANTED A GOOD FUTURE FOR ME...
SO I DIDN'T CRY AND I DECIDED...

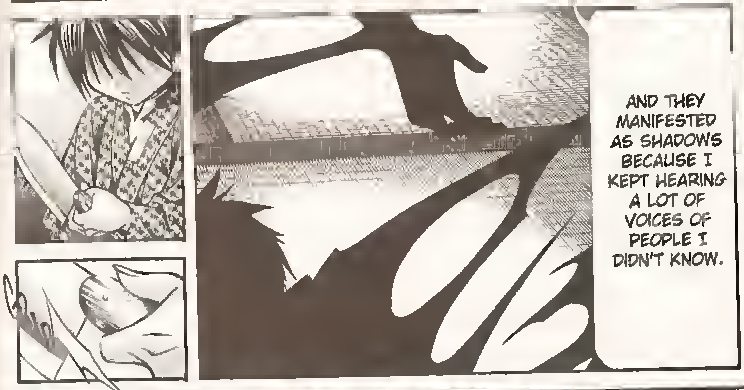

I'M BEING GIVEN AWAY...
I'M...

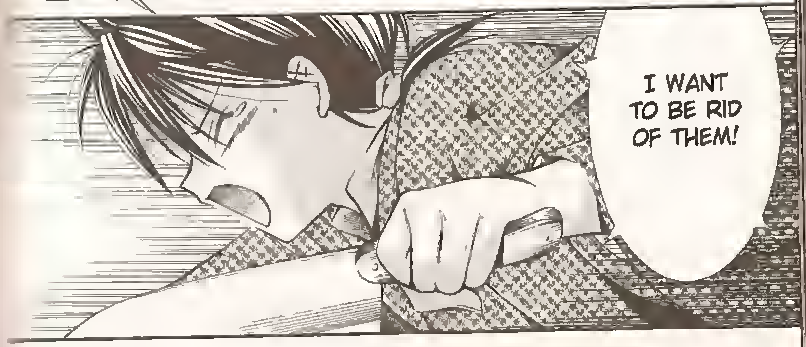
I'M GOING TO GO THERE AND BE HAPPY...FOR THEIR SAKE.


SLASH
SLASH
SLASH
WE'RE NOT LETTING YOU GO!
YOU CAN'T JUST
HEARING THEIR VOICES IS MAKING ME QUESTION MY DECISION! I CAN'T STAND IT!


I CAN'T LET MY MOTHER AND FATHER DOWN.
NO MATTER HOW LONELY I'LL BE!
I HAVE TO GO!


ALL THE WHISPERS AROUND ME WERE TORMENTING ME. THAT'S WHY I HAD THIS NIGHTMARE...


AND THEY MANIFESTED AS SHADOWS BECAUSE I KEPT HEARING A LOT OF VOICES OF PEOPLE I DIDN'T KNOW.


I WANT TO BE RID OF THEM!

I'M GOING.
AND I'M GOING TO BE HAPPY THERE... FOR MY PARENTS' SAKE.
TIME TO WAKE UP NOW.
TOOSH

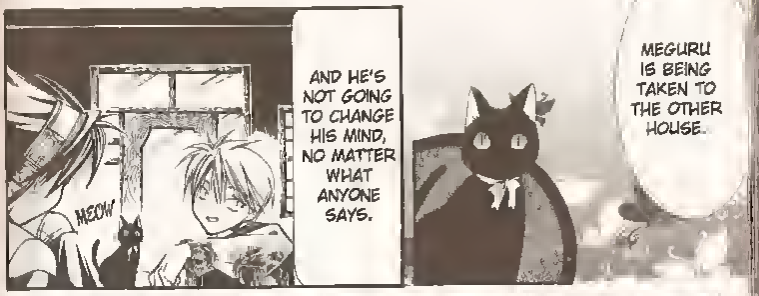
NOW I CAN NO LONGER HEAR WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ANYMORE...
NO ONE IS GOING TO MAKE ME CHANGE MY MIND...
...EVEN WHEN I RETURN TO REALITY.

PLEASE LOOK AFTER HIM.

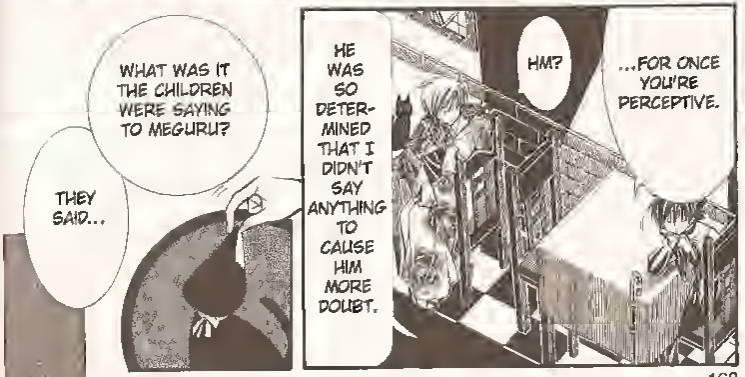
DIDN'T YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU? OR ARE YOU STUPID?
WHAT? ARE YOU DREAMING?
HUH?

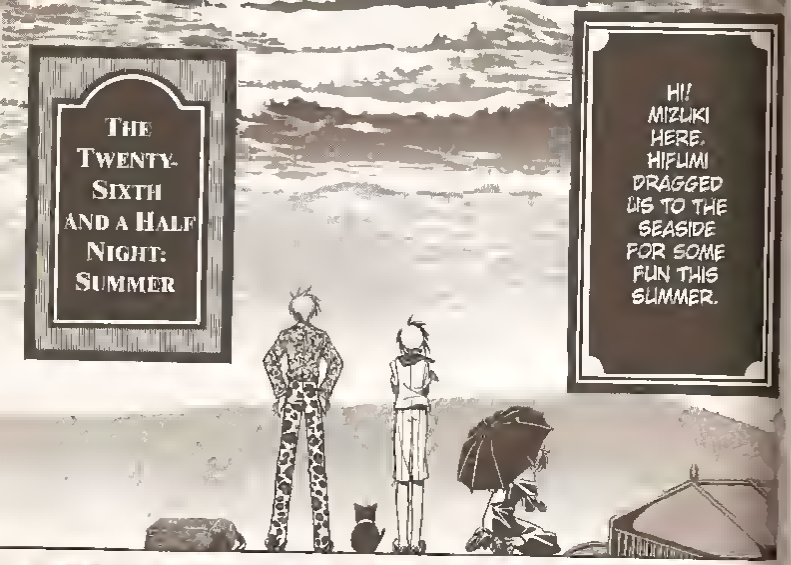
WOW... THIS IS A REALLY BIG HOUSE. I'M GOING TO BE A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY HERE?

YOU'RE HERE TO WORK AS A SERVANT.
THEY SENT YOU AWAY SO THAT THEY'LL HAVE ONE LESS MOUTH TO FEED.


MEGURU IS BEING TAKEN TO THE OTHER HOUSE.
AND HE'S NOT GOING TO CHANGE HIS MIND, NO MATTER WHAT ANYONE SAYS.
MEOW

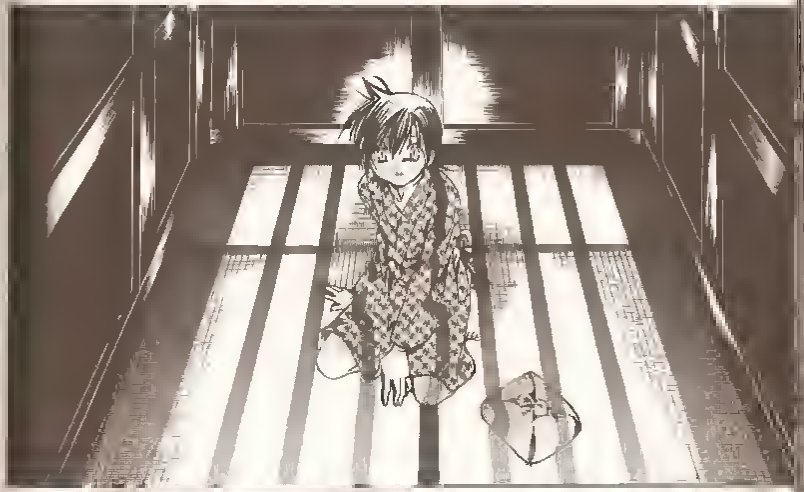
I HOPE IT WAS JUST A MISUNDERSTANDING.
BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT HIS FRIENDS TREATED HIM DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE THEY WERE JEALOUS...

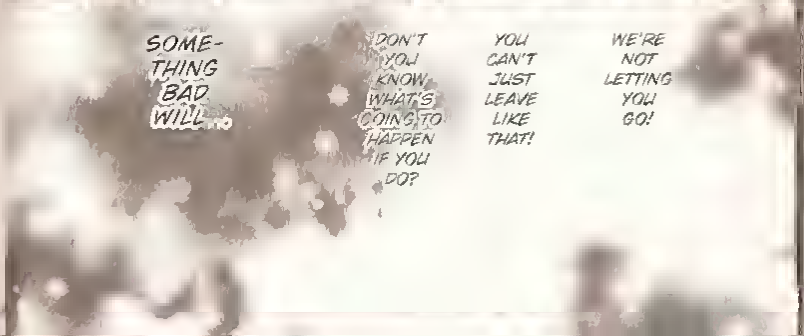

WHAT WAS IT THE CHILDREN WERE SAYING TO MEGURU?
THEY SAID...
HE WAS SO DETERMINED THAT I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO CAUSE HIM MORE DOUBT.
HM?
...FOR ONCE YOU'RE PERCEPTIVE.

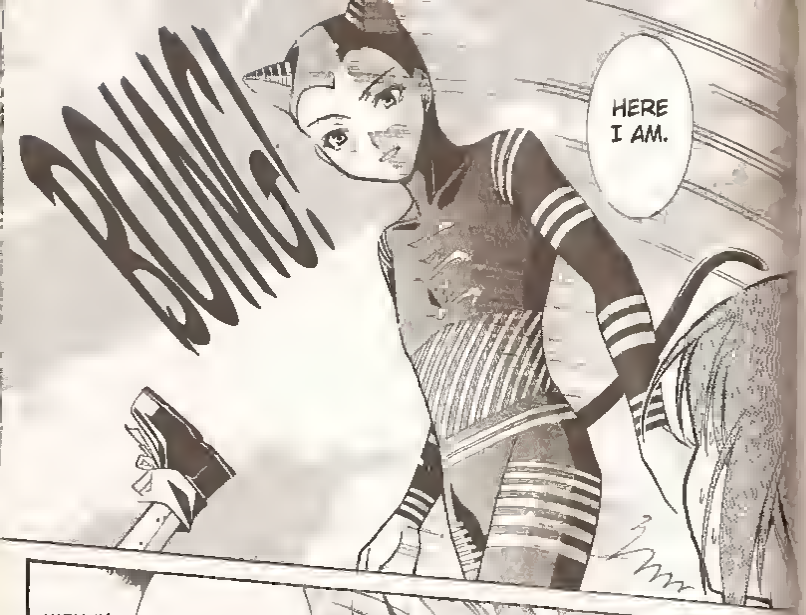

THE TWENTY-SIXTH AND A HALF NIGHT: SUMMER
HI! MIZUKI HERE. HIFUMI DRAGGED US TO THE SEASIDE FOR SOME FUN THIS SUMMER.

C'MON, HIRUKO. LET'S TRY AND HAVE A GOOD TIME TOGETHER..
THERE'S NOTHING TO BE DONE.
Ugh... The sun hurts...
I'M READY.
OH! YOU LOOK GREAT!
I HAD IT MADE ESPECIALLY FOR MIZUKI! ♡
At my family's factory.
UH, SURE.
LET'S GO SWIMMING. HERE, THIS IS FOR YOU.

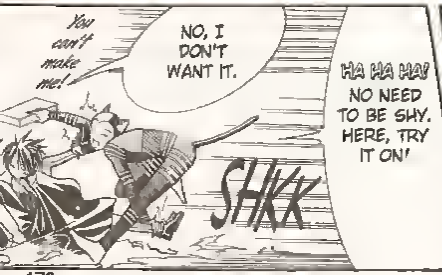
SLAM
YOU'LL GET TO WORK IMMEDIATELY!
THIS IS YOUR ROOM. GET READY QUICK.

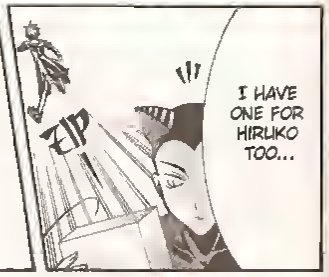



SOMETHING BAD WILL...
DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IF YOU DO?
YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE LIKE THAT!
WE'RE NOT LETTING YOU GO!


BOING!
HERE I AM.

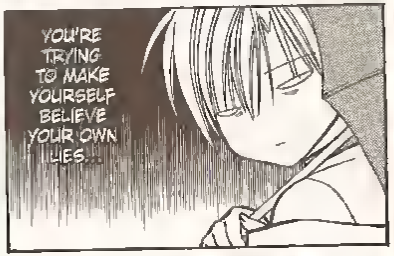
MIZUKI! COME BACK TO THIS WORLD!
HA HA! I CAN'T STOP HAVING FUN.
LET'S GO!

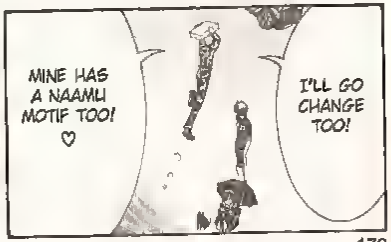

You can't make me!
NO, I DON'T WANT IT.
SHKK


HA HA HA! NO NEED TO BE SHY. HERE, TRY IT ON!
ZIP
I HAVE ONE FOR HIRUKO TOO...

OH, WHAT FUN THIS IS!
HE HE HEE

NO, MORE LIKE THIS...
MAYBE IT'LL LOOK LIKE THIS...
NAAMU ...
Heh heh, so cute...


YOU'RE TRYING TO MAKE YOURSELF BELIEVE YOUR OWN LIES...


MINE HAS A NAAMU MOTIF TOO! ♡
I'LL GO CHANGE TOO!

DREAM

Afterword

Hi! Shin Mashiba here. Thanks to you, we've reached volume four. Thanks so much to the people at Square Enix and my wonderful readers for all the support. Also, sincerest apologies to my editor to whom I've caused so much trouble.

This time I tried to delve deeper into the characters' pasts. We still haven't uncovered everything, but I hope you'll be patient.

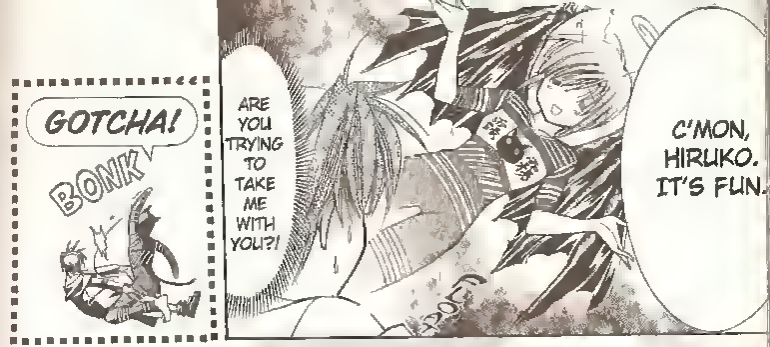
Big Thank You

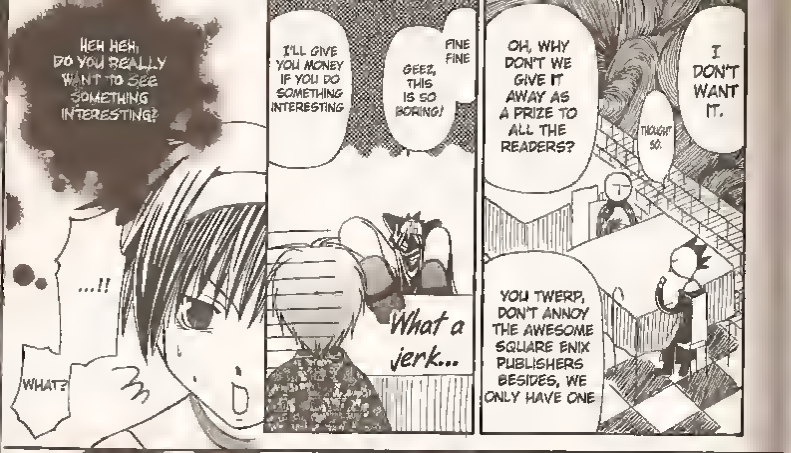
My editor Yuki Saeki and all the people at Square Enix.
My special friends Wan Wan Shiroi, Riru Shirayuki and Nema.
My wonderful assistants Katsumi Arai, Mieko Araki, Mai Tanaka, OKASAWA and MOA! (Info).

← Next up are Wan Wan Shiroi's guest pages, so get ready!
(Wan Wan, thank you for drawing it all without sketching it first! I'm so not delighted!)

← See page 178 to find out who won the contest from volume three!

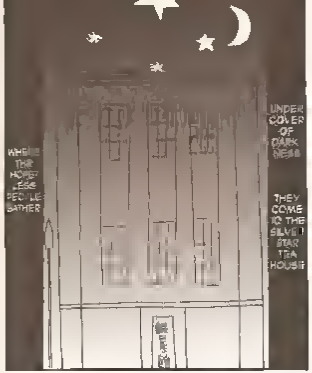
Let's Go!

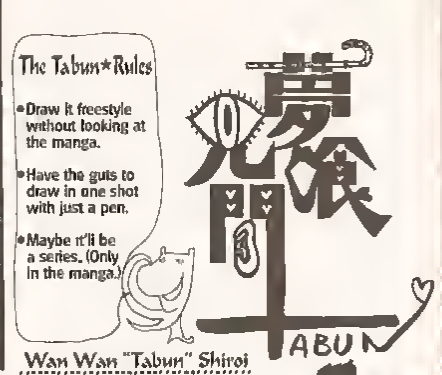



HEH HEH, DO YOU REALLY WANT TO SEE SOMETHING INTERESTING?
...!!
WHAT?
I'LL GIVE YOU MONEY IF YOU DO SOMETHING INTERESTING
GEEZ, THIS IS SO BORING!
FINE FINE
What a jerk...
OH, WHY DON'T WE GIVE IT AWAY AS A PRIZE TO ALL THE READERS?
I DON'T WANT IT.
THOUGHT SO.
YOU TWERP, DON'T ANNOY THE AWESOME SQUARE ENIX PUBLISHERS BESIDES, WE ONLY HAVE ONE

NOW, IF YOU COULD PLEASE MOVE THE TABLE?
I CAN'T HOLD IT ANY LONGER!
QUICKLY, PLEASE!
HO HO HO, IT'S ME, HIRUKO!
CLATTER
WHY ...?!

WE'RE OUT OF PAGES.
I'LL TAKE YOU TO AN INTERESTING WORLD
FEAR NOT, FOR THE ROSE'S PRINCE OF DESTINY HAS ARRIVED
SHWOOP
SOMETIMES DELUSIONAL ☆ ARRIVES!
CLINK CLINK


WHERE THE MOMENTLESS DEVOUR BATTLE
UNDER COVER OF DARK DEEDS
THEY COME TO THE SILENT STAR TEA HOUSE!


The Tabun★Rules
•Draw it freestyle without looking at the manga.
•Have the guts to draw in one shot with just a pen.
•Maybe it'll be a series. (Only in the manga.)
TABUN
Wan Wan "Tabun" Shiroi

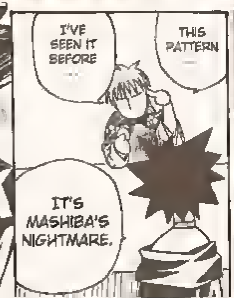
NOW HE'S SULKING!
YEAH, YEAH, I SHOULD ONLY EAT NIGHTMARES

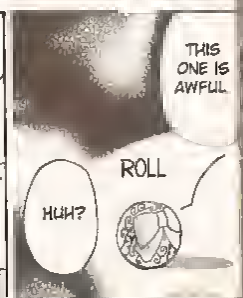
LOOK, IT'S GETTING REALLY ANNOYING, SO STOP IT.
GLOOM
YEAH, I CAN'T DRINK IT.
Eat a dream!

BLECH

Hee hee
Bottle dread Bottle dread Bottle dread
IF YOU LEAVE IT ALONE, THE GIRL'S RIBBON WILL GET TOO BIG...
..AND THE
PATTERN OF THE KIMONO WILL KEEP GETTING LARGER.

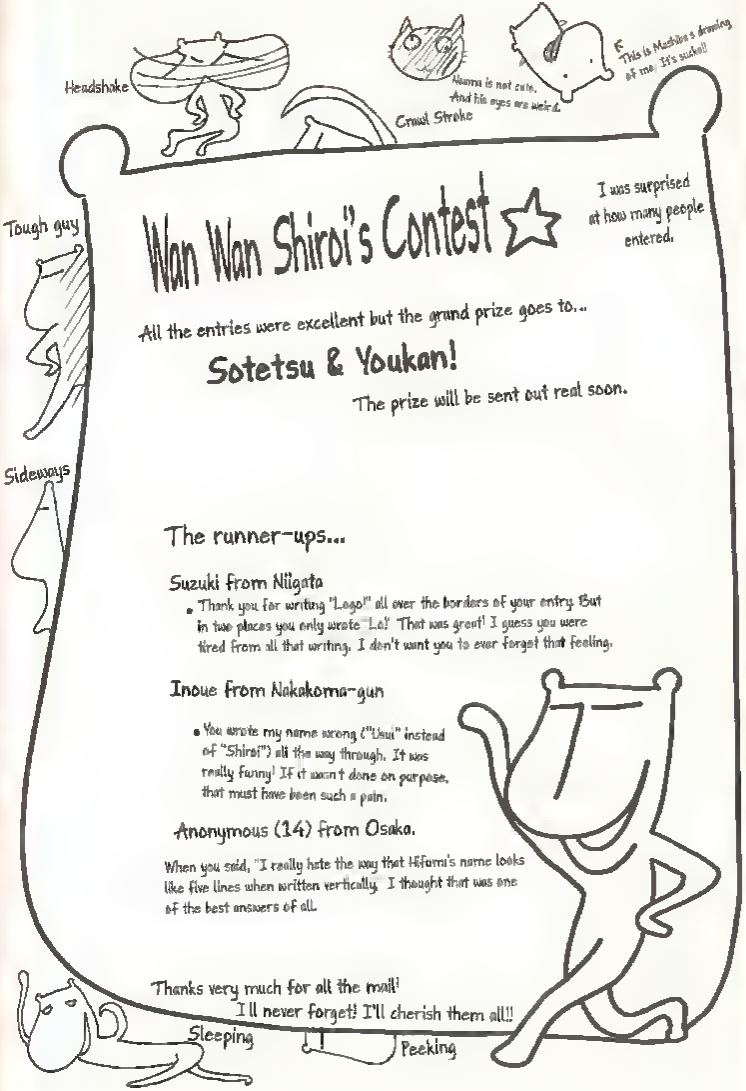
WOW, HIS CHARACTER IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT!
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO EAT THEM
WILL YOU TAKE THEM FOR ME?
SAY, LISTEN TO THIS! THE QUALITY OF DREAMS HAS BEEN REALLY BAD LATELY.


I'VE SEEN IT BEFORE
THIS PATTERN
IT'S MASHIBA'S NIGHTMARE.


THIS ONE IS AWFUL.
ROLL
HUH?

Dreams on the menu in this volume: a woman struggling with her appearance and another trapped in darkness, a man with a sinister childhood secret, a cocoon that is more than mere silk, a delusional dream with no happy ending, a man unable to let go of past regrets, and a child's imagination that is not as innocent as it seems.

AVAILABLE DECEMBER 2008!


Headshake
Usami is not cute. And his eyes are weird.
Cruel Stroke
F
This is Mashiko's drawing of me. It's sucks!!
Tough guy
Sideways
Wan Wan Shiroi's Contest
I was surprised at how many people entered.
All the entries were excellent but the grand prize goes to...
Sotetsu & Youkan!
The prize will be sent out real soon.
The runner-ups...
Suzuki from Niigata
• Thank you for writing "Lego!" all over the borders of your entry. But in two places you only wrote "Lo!" That was great! I guess you were tired from all that writing. I don't want you to ever forget that feeling.
Inoue from Nakakoma-gun
• You wrote my name wrong ("Usui" instead of "Shiroi") all the way through. It was really funny! If it wasn't done on purpose, that must have been such a pain.
Anonymous (14) from Osaka.
When you said, "I really hate the way that Hiromi's name looks like five lines when written vertically." I thought that was one of the best answers of all.
Thanks very much for all the mail!
I'll never forget! I'll cherish them all!!
Sleeping
Pecking

YUMEKUI KENBUN

NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR

YUMEKUI KENBUN: NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR
VOL. 4
The VIZ Media Edition

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PARENTAL ADVISORY
YUMEKUI KENBUN: NIGHTMARE INSPECTOR
is rated T for Teen and is recommended for ages 13 and up. This volume contains fantasy violence.
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SHIN MASHIBA

I have recurring dreams that I'm still in school. I relive final exams, summer vacation and the last day of school. When it's finally time for graduation, I start over again at the entrance exam.

Shin Mashiba's first manga, *Yumekui Kenbun* (Nightmare Inspector), premiered in *Monthly Stencil*, a shojo magazine, in December 2001 and was then serialized in *Monthly G Fantasy* from 2003 to 2007. Mashiba-san's own nightmares include being forced to eat 50 living slugs and being chased by time.